

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

There will be another procedure meeting next week. Time to send you another note.

With regard to the item on the agenda concerning the restoration of the facilities in the Board of St. Eustatius I would like to refer you to the penultimate paragraph (starting with "My advice") of my note of 2 May last. This advice boils down to abandoning the path of gradually and returning to the situation as it was (but within the correct and legal frameworks) where progress must be made on the basis of mutual administrative agreements.

On May 14, 2020, Van Putten makes the same appeal in BES reporter ¹, but he uses big words like illegal, immoral and deceptive. And where I do understand his frustration, these are of course not the words with which you easily open a dialogue. In my experience, Van Putten doesn't conveniently open a potential dialogue here, but I'm convinced that he speaks on behalf of many politicians.

The BES reporter article also mentions nepotism. It seems as if Van Putten sees it as an inevitable phenomenon on a small island like St. Eustatius with large families. It is of course reprehensible to "parachute" "own" people on lucrative posts. The selection and assignment process for senior officials in particular should - even on a small island with large families - be transparent so that everyone can form an opinion about the extent to which suitability for a position has been taken into account in a well-considered manner in the process. Speaking about this, I wonder how a crisis manager ended up on this island 'all of a sudden'. I have not seen a public vacancy (I may have missed it, of course) but 'all of a sudden' someone appears to have come flying in from the Netherlands. And of course there is the COVID-19 threat but there is frequent contact with the government in The Hague so why in addition to a two-headed government commissariat also a crisis manager should be here in the village, seems to me a justified and relevant question. In any case, I'm not surprised when Van Putten wonders what in God's name he has done wrong if this is the way the Dutch interveners are doing it.

According to the quoted article, Van Putten warns the inhabitants of St. Eustatius that they are quickly slipping to the level of second-class citizens in their own country. In a motivation he refers to ancestors who have fought for their freedom in blood, sweat and tears. That seems to me to be an emotional argument, referring to the history of slavery, which is not at all at issue here. It can be done differently, more rationally. Let me give you some examples.

The current problem of drinking water being cut off time and again (in order to remedy a leak) is not only extremely awkward in this COVID-19 period, but has also been known to the Hague Ministry

¹ <http://bes-reporter.com/index.php/2020/05/14/van-putten-plp-asks-knops-to-reconsider-emergency-law/>

responsible for this for at least five years. Each time, the necessary investments are pushed back in time. This is currently programmed for 2020 and our government commissioner also expects the water supply problems to be solved by the autumn of 2020.

Note: The water supply system consists mainly of three components for production, storage and distribution. The innovations that are envisaged concern - as I understand it - storage. It is not entirely clear to me whether this will also improve the distribution over the island (in my opinion the weak spot).

Students and lecturers of secondary education are waiting for the CXC Decree, which is intended to "guarantee" the value of the CSEC diploma in the Dutch educational system, among other things. That CXC Decree is expected in the short term - after some pressure on the Minister of Education, Culture and Science through the intervention of the OCW Committee - but that will be almost six years (!) after the English language of instruction and the CXC system (including CSEC as the "equivalent" of the HAVO) have been defined and introduced in education on St. Eustatius.

Another laxity that can certainly lead to feelings of frustration and the feeling of being second-class citizens in the Netherlands concerns the file 'air connections'. The report 'Connectivity Caribbean part of the Kingdom' (dated July 30, 2018, presented to you in March 2019) appears in February of this year to be on a pile of 'pieces to be handled' (if I may believe the reporting in BES reporter). On page 46 of this report I see how France is deploying the PSO (Public Service Obligation: a form of public transport) in the area around Guadeloupe. A trip from Guadeloupe to the island of Marie Galante (a distance from Guadeloupe that is comparable to that from Sint Maarten to Sint Eustatius) costs a maximum of 46 euros for a one-way trip. So a return trip for less than 100 euros. A return trip Sint Eustatius-Sint Maarten via "our" monopolist Winair costs about 250 USD. And that is quite a lot of money in a living environment of which the benchmark for a social minimum has been set with much reluctance in The Hague and in which poverty is more the rule than the exception ².

Very recently I put our Government Commissioner on the trail of these expensive air connections. He indicated that in consultation with the authorities of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, under the leadership of the Kingdom Representative (on Bonaire), it has been agreed to investigate whether air traffic between Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba - in other words: periodic, affordable and direct air traffic between the Windward and Leeward Islands of the Dutch Caribbean - will be possible. A plan to this end was ready around the turn of the year 2017/2018 (the so-called CN-Express) but partly due to the actions of Winair and the RCN, under the leadership of the same Kingdom Representative, that plan "evaporated".

² The report also elaborates on page 47 an example representative of the journey by air between the Windward and Leeward Islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

From Eutel - our telecom provider; next to Stuco (water and electricity) also a "government-NV" - I understood in an informal conversation that the purchase of "cheap internet" in the United States is being looked into because it might be cheaper than the purchase of internet via the facility created by MinBZK (SSCS). The mere idea that this might be possible should be reason to reconsider the financing of the SSCS. In my opinion, the prosperous European Netherlands should have the moral obligation at this time, when the importance of 21st-century skills is pointed out in schools, to make an internet facility as equal as possible at rates that are *at best* comparable to those in the European Netherlands. The rates here are as high as ever for private individuals, certainly in relation to what you get for it, compared to those in the European Netherlands. For institutions such as - for example - schools they are even exorbitantly high, but this 'blamage' remains somewhat out of the picture because the European Netherlands bears (part?) of these costs ³.

The report 'The Kingdom against the light' (April 2019) should not be missing from this list. In my opinion, little has happened to it since this report was completed. Perhaps someone has read it through, but in my opinion it has not yet led to a further discussion about an effective way in which the European Netherlands should deal with St. Eustatius (or broader: Caribbean Netherlands).

So far some (probably not all) rational appeals in the context of the status of second-class Dutchmen without pulling the map of slavery. In other words: that there are feelings of frustration among the Statian when it comes to the relationship with the European Netherlands seems fully explainable to me. The question now is: what are you going to do with it?

May I once again wish you much wisdom and decisiveness?

Kind regards,

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³ More than a thousand dollars a month for a (small) school is a lot of money for an internet supply, but on the budget of a ministry this amount on an annual basis is only a ripple behind the decimal point.