

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

With interest I followed parts of the debate (June 3rd) on the internet (in between of course I just had to work ;-)) and later I read the report of the debate again. I would like to thank you for conveying our concerns while at the same time I see that the Secretary of State has not changed course nor momentum. He just keeps going, no matter what you think. Characteristic of what I think I noticed was the remark by Mrs. Kuiken, who, on behalf of the people of Statia, expressed grumpy words to which the State Secretary said that he did not realise that Mrs. Kuiken was grumpy (or at least did her best for that ;-)). The State Secretary seems to be selectively sensitive to signals of input. Where he says he spoke to a lot of people during his visits to the island, I feel the need to mitigate those bold statements. Among other things he mentioned his visit to a 'Taste of the Cultures' at Lion's Den. I myself was at that (monthly) event and saw that he was surrounded by his entourage, which in practice worked as an excellent barrier against Statian people wanting to speak to the Secretary of State. It must have worked out for a few, but it certainly wasn't very many people. Even the informal "get a beer" was done for him by a member of his staff. It is my conviction that the Secretary of State and his entourage are not at all waiting for reply or discussion; it has to go according to *his* plan, and nothing else. Anyway, it's just who you want to believe...

Which brings me to the general point of communication. I have already told you many times that the previous government commissioner and his deputy were not like communicating with 'ordinary people'. The current team - Marnix van Rij and Alida Francis - may have been carved out of a different wood, but 'the proof of the pudding' lies in 'the eating' and apart from his talk for the radio about COVID19 - by definition a matter of 'sending' and not 'receiving' - there has been very little communication with the population. This may not be physically possible at the moment, but - as I suggested earlier - the world of ICT is familiar with the phenomenon of 'webinar', in which you can reach a lot of people via the internet who can also ask questions or enter into discussions. Such a creative alternative has not yet been heard here.

What I wrote to you about earlier: ferry transport hasn't been heard about either. The Secretary of State doesn't think that's such a point, but I do attach importance to it. After all, somebody must have whispered it to the State Secretary in his ear and that somebody must be familiar with the fact that a ferry has been thought up here before and shortly after that nobody mentioned it anymore. It seems an idea that sounds good but in the long run just isn't attractive, both in terms of numbers of customers or travel time and in terms of return on investment. Also the dependency on St. Maarten isn't getting any less (at the time of Hurricane Irma it was a much heard argument to reduce this dependency but that sound is muted).

That as a result of this point the flight connections have not been put in the spotlight is really a mystery to me. According to the European (French) example, the PSO (mentioned and explained in the report 'Connectivity Caribbean part of the Kingdom') should be a much more feasible map, unless Winair, RCN or other stakeholders put a stop to it (which would not surprise me). Certainly in combination with

the 'ZVK' flights (i.e. these no longer to Colombia but to care providers on the Leeward Islands) this should, in my opinion, lead to a positive business case ¹. To date, I have not yet seen a Committee in the Lower House of Parliament enthusiastically take up this business case. Perhaps the Court of Audit would like to pass on such a business case; in any event, I have asked the Court of Audit to do so.

Back to communication and transparency. To date, I have not yet seen an initiative in which the near and political future of the island (including the relationship with the European Netherlands) has been discussed in a 'broad social discussion' on the island. The village is small enough to invite everyone instead of just a representation that is not real representation (I am thinking of the Social Council of Advice: the 'scapegoat' for local and national politics to 'feign' broad consultation while nothing essential is being discussed). Such a broad consultation is here called a 'townhall meeting' and in this COVID19 period such a thing might not be possible, at least not physically, but of course in the form of a webinar. Or in the open air. But up to now, the arguments have mainly been found *not* to hold such a meeting, instead of looking for possibilities to consult with each other. And when I say 'consultation', I of course mean that all input is welcome, not just the pre-directed input of the European Netherlands and its representatives on the island ².

The State Secretary wants to see the discussion on democracy on St. Eustatius separated from a broader discussion in which the Dutch Caribbean and the Kingdom Representative have or have not been assigned a role. I agree with you that precisely this broader context also matters in relation to St. Eustatius. I refer to the research report 'The Kingdom against the light' of April 2019 initiated by you. I am much more in line with the line that the Council of State also propagates and in which the individual islands are given a strengthened role in their communication with 'The Hague'. Personally, I even go so far as to say that it might be better for all parties to (re)organize the 'countries' as a 'public entity' with legislation specifically tailored to each island/country. Thus elevating the Constitution to the Constitution of the Kingdom and allowing the Statute to lapse. It seems to me to be much more in line with the existing power relations within the Kingdom. I'm not a lawyer and will therefore keep a low profile in that area; what I do want to say is that I have a 'strong feeling' in this domain. I think that in principle the law should be the same for everyone - both in the European and Caribbean Netherlands. Only those exceptions seem justified to me that are related to the specific characteristics of the islands

¹ Where, in my opinion, the Colombian doctor in the European Netherlands is not allowed to work just like that as a doctor without a professional test as well as a test concerning general knowledge and skills, the Dutch Caribbean is simply 'offered' to Colombian care providers. I say this with a lot of respect for health care in Colombia, but the alleged dichotomy (Colombian doctor in relation to the European or Dutch Caribbean) seems to me to have no right to exist. In addition, I note that, looking on the website of the BIG registration, it says here, among other things, "*A diploma obtained on Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba counts as a foreign diploma. This is subject to extra conditions*". **The Caribbean Netherlands is mainly Caribbean and not much of The Netherlands.** Can you imagine that the IND plays an important role in a move from - for example - Friesland to Limburg? Why then when moving from The Hague to St. Eustatius (as I did myself in 2014)? With the result that my health insurance was terminated, as if I was moving abroad... It doesn't give me the nice feeling of a 'special' municipality *in one and the same Kingdom*.

² Consultation of course also includes publicly accessible reporting. Those of the Executive Council cannot be read or understood without underlying documentation. Those of the Social Advisory Council and of the Central Dialogue are not publicly accessible. Is there more? I don't know...

in the Caribbean region, for example the tropical climate, the fact that in all cases it concerns a relatively small community on an island and that the common language on the windward islands of the Caribbean Netherlands is English. For the rest, in my opinion there should only be the Dutch system of laws and regulations. So no different Civil Code or something like that ³. A related aspect concerns inclusiveness. When the Prime Minister addresses the Dutch people during the current COVID19-crisis I would like to understand the Caribbean part as well, so not only "visitors of parks and beaches" but also - by way of example - the walkers on the Quill, or something like that. I am convinced that neither the Prime Minister nor his copywriters will ever (also) have the Caribbean Netherlands on their mind when they prepare or give a speech to "all Dutch people". I would also like to see this in the media (e.g. in the weather forecast or storm warnings, just as I see the Canary Islands being involved in the weather forecast on television in Spain), but well, the central government is not about the media (and that's actually a good thing).

Note: At the same time a comment fits here. In order not to 'colonize' the residents (oh, loaded word...) I mean the inclusiveness that goes hand in hand with proper respect for the own culture of the islands of the Dutch Caribbean. When I search the website of the Central Government for the official holidays in the Netherlands, why can't I find Statiaday and Sabaday? Somehow I am deeply ashamed that I only heard about the First Salute for the first time when I went to live here in 2014...

I conclude with the message I heard this morning: the 'Karel Doorman' would no longer be needed here and returns to the European Netherlands. I thought the ship would stay here for three months. So far an outbreak of COVID19 has fortunately not occurred, but with the withdrawal of our 'medical insurance', which is the 'Karel Doorman' after all, the islanders are left to their own devices, all the more so because the hospitainer is not yet operational and the promised extra staff is not there either. A not very supportive idea to call back the ship now, I would like to say to you.

Kind regards,

J.H.T. (Jan) Meijer MSc MBA,
Bellevue Road 4, Upper Round Hill, St. Eustatius, Dutch Caribbean.

³ From that point of view, I don't see any reason for the US dollar as a means of payment with a Central Bank on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Why not just the euro and the Dutch Central Bank? In this region, the US dollar is not used at all, or you should count Puerto Rico and the United States as part of the Caribbean Region.