

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee (KOREL),

With regard to the bill Restoration of Services in the Board of the Public Entity of St. Eustatius (Wet herstel voorzieningen Sint Eustatius) I would like to bring the following to your attention.

It concerns the role of the Representative of the Dutch Central Government; a function that is currently not actually fulfilled but which does have an 'acting' Representative of the Dutch Central Government.

The Council of State is critical about the role of the Representative of the Dutch Central Government. His added value is questioned. The line on which the Council of State sits is aimed at strengthening the role of the Island Governor, who if necessary has a direct 'line' with the ministries in The Hague or the coordinating Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

The legislative proposal concerning the Restoration of the facilities in the administration of the Public Entity of St. Eustatius nevertheless introduces this Kingdom Representative again and assigns powers to him that interfere with the internal course of affairs on St. Eustatius. An intervention from The Hague is not fun but is understood and (reluctantly) obeyed, an intervention from Bonaire (where the Representative of the Dutch Central Government is located) is considered inappropriate. Along a detour 'The Hague' can in this way interfere in matters that in principle can be dealt with in an island way, that is the idea.

After six years of living on St. Eustatius one thing at least has become very clear to me. Where in one way or another residents from different cities in the same province in the European Netherlands still feel some kinship in some cases, in practice the six islands are completely focused on themselves. Bonaire is seen in the corridors as the new Curaçao: the administrative center of the six islands in the period before October 10, 2010. This took especially good care of itself and to a lesser extent of the other islands, let alone the small ones.

Thinking in a certain hierarchy on the Caribbean islands/countries is a very European Dutch way of 'modeling' that has nothing at all to do with the way the coexistence of the islands is felt and experienced here.

As far as I am aware, your competence as the Upper House with regard to legislative proposals actually only lies in accepting or rejecting them. After all, the right of amendment does not lie with the Senate. Considering that the House of Representatives has not exercised this right concerning this matter and that your framework of action is limited, I would like to suggest you to reject the bill for the reason of the role of the Kingdom Representative. In my opinion, it would (rightly) force the State Secretary for Kingdom Relations to amend and resubmit his bill.

By way of illustration, I enclose a passage from my mail to the House of Representatives on this subject.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention during this 'intervention' on my part. I wish you much wisdom.

Kind regards,

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Bellevue Road 4, Upper Round Hill, St. Eustatius, Dutch Caribbean.

From my e-mail of 5 June 2020 (shortly after the debate on this subject in the House of Representatives) to the Committee on Kingdom Relations of the House of Representatives: [...]

After all, the State Secretary wants to see the discussion about democracy on St. Eustatius primarily separated from a broader discussion in which the Caribbean Netherlands 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 body' with legislation specifically tailored to each (egg) 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 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 legislation and regulations. So no different Civil Code or something like that. 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 (for example 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 anyway, the central government is not about the media (which is actually a good thing too).

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 St. Eustatius Day and Saba Day? 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...