

Dear Chairman and members of the Commission on Kingdom Relations,

If there had been a good consultation with the Statian population about the future of the island over the past two and a half years, I would of course have made my contribution there as well. Because this consultation has deliberately been omitted, I would like to give you my idea about it. There are two things I would like to say: my idea is not fine-tuned (after all, I do not know how I should have done it) and I am not exhaustive, there are probably other subjects I have not thought of at the moment or in which I feel a bit less involvement (an involvement which would possibly be there if the discussion about this had been "broad").

My points mentioned below are based on my personal experience to date (I have lived and worked in the European Netherlands for almost sixty years and for the last six years I live and work on St. Eustatius).

Let me start with article 1 of the Constitution, which reads: *All those who are in the Netherlands are treated equally in equal cases. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, philosophy of life, political affiliation, race, gender or any other ground is not allowed.*

The Netherlands can be regarded as consisting of a European part and a Caribbean part (as much becomes clear when reading article 132a of the same Constitution. Without wanting to repeat the entire process in the run-up to 10-10-10, I would like the (ground) legal framework for both the European and Caribbean part of the Netherlands to be identical, unless there is a good reason to draw up separate legislation and regulations for the Caribbean part of the Netherlands. Such a good reason could be the geographical and climatic conditions that are very different between the two Netherlands, or the official language that is English here. It is also possible that agreements have been or are being made about what is done by the European Netherlands for the benefit of the Public Entity and what is governed by the Public Entity itself. With respect to this demarcation I have already presented to you on August 3rd of this year that it is, to put it mildly, 'not easy' to find the existing demarcation in one (overarching) legal regulation. Nor does the fact that a different Civil Code applies in both Netherlands contribute to the credible applicability of article 1 of the Constitution.

In my opinion, the discussion about the social minimum in the Dutch Caribbean would not need to exist if the distinction between the European and Caribbean Netherlands in the socio-economic domain is not so desperately maintained. It would also help if all Dutch people (not only the European ones) have a BSN, the currency used in the Dutch Caribbean is the euro (after all, no surrounding island officially uses the US dollar as its currency) and European Dutch banks also offer their services in the Dutch Caribbean.

Then the IND: the first (almost) sixty years of my life I never had anything to do with this organization, now that I live and work 'somewhere else in the same country' I am passed through the filter of this organization and I am 'tolerated' because I can provide in my own income. Conversely, the Caribbean Dutchman is not put in the way in the European Netherlands (rightly so by the way!) when he or she emigrates (weird word if you are going to live somewhere else in the same country) to the European Netherlands (but you have to apply for a BSN first because - for me unclear reason - we don't do that in the Dutch Caribbean for the time being).

Note: At the moment there are teachers working at the Gwendoline van Puttenschool who started this (school) year and for whom the IND intake process has not yet been completed (a process that undoubtedly runs faster at Saba because the 'work permit' is no longer required for teachers there:

why is that not true for St. Eustatius?). Without a completed IND intake process, no registration with Census and consequently no bank account. To receive the salary, the teachers involved have to queue up with a cheque at an extremely customer unfriendly bank (the WIB: Windward Islands Bank, with as supervisor not the Dutch Central Bank (which would be expected, but the Central Bank of Curacao and St. Maarten, other countries within the Kingdom...)).

And then the health insurance. Here there is a 'health insurance fund', the 'ZVK', while in the European Netherlands for years there is the compulsory basic insurance where the customer can choose from competing providers. Additional insurance(s) are possible. We - my wife and I - were very satisfied with our choice of healthcare insurance in the European Netherlands, but we had to let it go when we "emigrated" from here. In itself this is still viable, as we expect that the care is still well organized, but in case of a return (an "emigration" from the Dutch Caribbean under a simultaneous "immigration" into the European Netherlands) the choice for the same health insurance as in the past may have been desired by us, but may have been provided by the insurance company with admission criteria (not for the basic insurance, for which there is after all an acceptance obligation for the company, but for possible extras for which we were previously also insured). When you move (or "emigrate") from Limburg to Groningen (by way of example) all this does not apply, why then all those differences between the Caribbean and European Netherlands?

Incidentally, for the student who departs from the Dutch Caribbean (who is therefore ZVK-insured) to the European Netherlands for a study at higher professional education level, ZVK pays the premium for an insurance with a company to which ZVK is 'affiliated'. This company is specialized in insurances for expats, but Dutch Caribbean citizens who are going to study in the European Netherlands are - by definition - not expats. The insurance offered by this company is not seen by the SVB and the CAK as "health insurance" in the sense of the applicable legislation, with the result that the student in question is given the designation "uninsured", which is punishable in the European Netherlands. Introduce here - just like in the European Netherlands - the basic insurance with possible supplementary insurances and let Dutch companies offer their products here as well under simultaneous phasing out of the ZVK and a bit of inequality has been removed. This not to mention the 'abuses' observed here, where bureaucrats (read: non-doctors) of the 'ZVK' set aside a doctor's opinion in favor of a decision to be taken by the 'ZVK' on whether or not a patient should be referred to a medical specialist.

Then, and I will conclude, a single word about public transport. Public transport here is 'the plane'. There is no city or regional bus service, but there is a flight connection to the outside world. Seen from St. Eustatius, it is controlled by the monopolist Winair and offers a connection to St. Maarten. Not directly to Saba or Bonaire, no, only to St. Maarten: about fifty kilometers from here (by sea, that is) and a return trip costs the Statian more than 200 US dollars. From St. Maarten the Statian can continue his or her journey and should he or she go to Bonaire, he or she must of course first fly to Curacao. If I wanted to travel from Limburg to Zeeland and I would be forced to first visit other countries such as Germany and Belgium, the questions from the Chamber would not be of the air. Here we don't know any better that a trip from St. Eustatius to Bonaire is via the 'countries' of St. Maarten and Curaçao, and Winair is too much of a monopolist to take on any customer wishes. The owner of Winair (including the European Dutch government!) doesn't want his hands - at least that's how it looks - on this regional fire. The fact that other companies might want to offer direct flight connections to Saba and Bonaire is thwarted by Winair's ownership structure. In addition, another airline - EZ Air - is now flying to Bonaire (in corona time), but only for the transport of patients (and for occasional charter assignments from the local government). So it is possible... But who cares about the wishes of those few Statians: the local and central government at least not!

I conclude with a single word for nuance. I already mentioned it at the beginning of this writing: there is no fine-tuning, so I don't know if I am speaking here on behalf of many Statian people. At the same time I am of the opinion that many Statian do not know how much better they could have it if they knew how it could be done. That requires information and consultation. In my opinion I have only mentioned points that give basic shape to a society like the one in the European Netherlands ¹.

It seems to me that there is still enough room to give substance to one's own, culturally related, Statian 'feeling'. After all, in a Public Entity you can make legal agreements about 'who does what'. I mentioned earlier the insightfully desired demarcation in this. Out of my mind, and therefore not necessarily completely, I see that Defence is being filled in by the European Netherlands, just like education and care. Maintenance of school buildings is the responsibility of the individual islands of the Dutch Caribbean, just as the levying and collection of income tax is the responsibility of the Dutch Caribbean. I think I know this because I experience it that way and because others (who have lived here for much longer) confirm it, not because I know a clear demarcation with legal status in this respect. Feelings of 'need for more autonomy' can perhaps be further elaborated here.

Perhaps all this is known to you because there is after all a neat report 'The Kingdom against the light' by the University of Groningen of April 2019, drawn up in your commission, on the basis of which the organization of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in general, and - in this context - of the Caribbean Netherlands in particular, could be given further shape.

With the ten-year anniversary of 10-10-10 in sight, I wish you once again much wisdom in the further elaboration of our state system.

With kind regards,

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¹ Discussions about the future of the island have also been missed in recent years in which the European Netherlands intervened in local government. Tourism could be a pillar, although that is not so obvious (after all, there may be more or less obvious pillars). Starting from tourism, there is now the new building of the Golden Rock Resort. A broader story in which tourism fits is unknown to me. In other words: what more needs to be done on the island in order for 'tourism' to reach its full potential? A point mentioned here and there that still needs to be worked out, has potential in my opinion. After all, the unique selling point of the (volcanic) island with the black sand on the beach is its 'history'. The role of St. Eustatius in the recognition of the current United States ('the first salute') is one that, with some further elaboration, I think could have a big impact, with the (read: all) Americans as the most important market to be explored.