

Dear Chairman and members of the Commission on Kingdom Relations,

After I thought I had given some response (23 October last) to the statement of Mr. Van Raak (ref. 'kingdom.nu', 23 October 2020), as well as Mrs. Leerdam of the PLP had expressed her reaction (24 October last) to his proposal to organize a referendum, aimed at the question whether the Statian population really wants to leave the country 'The Netherlands', there is now a second argument by Mr. Van Raak (ref. 'kingdom.nu', 27 October 2020), in which the same message as in his first argument can be heard.

I would call the tone that is being set anything but diplomatic. I find "inflammatory language" a little too sharp, but his tone and the content of his argument are anything but focused on a constructive dialogue in which parties can get to know each other better.

Of course that is not necessary because Mr. Van Raak obviously knows St. Eustatius well. The fact that he stayed there eight years ago and his experiences at that time - apparently - were quite different from his expectations is proof of this. However, this has not so much to do with an aversion to The Netherlands or to the Dutch. Hospitality is a subject in development on the island. As far as I can judge, the quality of the hotels and guesthouses has increased in recent years, but it is not exactly the same as in the well-known tourist resorts, or even the same as in The Netherlands.

As far as I thought I knew Mr. Van Raak (not personally but through the media) I saw in him someone with the heart in the right place with a sense for socially responsible relationships. What I read of him now is extremely out of tune with what I had expected with a normally so positive but critical mind. You would almost think that there is something behind it, something like: "let Ronald 'yapping' on behalf of the Lower House or broader: on behalf of politics, he will leave anyway after the elections".

Be that as it may, the public presentation of Saba as the apple of his eye, as the best pupil of the class, so positively different from the worse brother, St. Eustatius, is not only inappropriate, it is also based on assumptions and - worse - different treatments of The Netherlands on the one hand with Saba or St. Eustatius on the other hand.

After all, didn't I read carefully that on that beautiful Saba, where the residents are so happy with the investments made by The Netherlands, not everything is going well (how could it be otherwise with such a large distance between the European and Caribbean Netherlands) and that the residents are often invited to share those problems, where all political parties in the Lower House are then happy to raise those problems with the government?

This hardly ever happens at St. Eustatius. Apart from the few times that members of the Commission on Kingdom Relations themselves sought contact with St. Eustatius via Facebook, it is by no means self-evident that St. Eustatius residents are invited to share problems, after which these problems are raised with the government with a certain degree of obviousness. From my own experience I know that regularly written letters to the same Commission in the House of Representatives at best get a response as "with notification accepted, the Commission takes no further action". I deduce from this

that St. Eustatius and Saba receive a very different treatment. And should anyone be tempted to mention the Advisory Council as the representative of the residents and with whom consultations are held, I note that this sham is made up of people elected by the government/government commissioner who were suspected of fulfilling the role of 'clap cattle' well. And the consultation that is being held with them is apparently not worth putting on the agenda or taking minutes (in any case, the agenda or minutes are not publicly available) and the items that are being discussed are often already past the stage of decision making. In short, this consultation does not represent much in terms of content.

And, once again, if what Mr. Van Raak writes was all true, but what he says about anti-Dutch feelings is at least more nuanced than he sees it. Locally there is a justified feeling of frustration here that no one ever seems to take Statia into account (Statians are "second-class Dutchmen"). And that feeling now seems to be "bought off" with infrastructural projects (where the reinforcement of the rock under Fort Oranje is of course nothing less than falling under the duty of care of The Netherlands). According to Van Raak, 65 million euros have been invested in St. Eustatius since the intervention. Of course people at Statia are happy with the improvements that have been made as a result, but the core of the problem is deeper, as I already described.

That of those investments could just be true, but no one in The Hague was concerned about a serious discussion with the residents about the future of the island or about a healthy relationship between St. Eustatius and 'The Hague'. In any case, such a conversation has not taken place in the past six years (otherwise I would have experienced it myself) and probably this situation has been going on for much longer. Whereas Mr. Van Raak, referring to infrastructural improvements, states that the island is a lot nicer than it was in 2018, I would rather say that The Hague has not wanted to see St. Eustatius as an equal discussion partner for the past two and a half years, which in my view and referring to the name of the law on the matter, amounts to neglect of tasks.

Mrs. Leerdam's reply, which, according to her words, also looks forward to the beginning of a new era, also mentions the referendum held in 2014, the validity of which can possibly be disputed, but which in any case shows that a majority wants 'autonomy' and at most a few want 'independence'. By autonomy the PLP certainly does not mean independence, I think I understand, but it does mean a greater say in how things should be organized here on the island. And is that so strange? And doesn't the status of 'public body' offer good expectations for that? A good conversation could clear the air here, but yes, a good conversation... It hasn't come of it so far.

I conclude with my previously expressed wish. It would adorn 'The Hague' if she came with an invitation to exchange ideas about her plans for the future with Mrs. Leerdam, as group leader of the largest party on the island.

With kind regards,

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