

Dear chairman and members of the Infrastructure and Water Commission,

The day after I sent you a letter on November 26th in response to the published Aviation Memorandum 2020-2050, I learn via Kingdom.nu ¹ and BES-reporter.com ² that Winair is going to set up a temporary, weekly connection between Sint Eustatius and Bonaire v.v. ³ This will take effect on 1 December next. Friends of ours wanted to book before December 8th but on the receiving side they didn't know anything about it. So this plan doesn't seem to be worked out yet, at least not internally Winair.

First of all I would like to say that I am glad that we are thinking of setting up a periodical, direct flight connection to Bonaire v.v. In principle I very much welcome this initiative. At the same time: we have seen the good start here before and until now it was in practice nothing more than 'test balloons' that just disappeared after a few weeks with the argument that the interest would be (too) low ⁴. Here too - as Winair itself points out - this is a temporary measure.

I am now going to sketch you a dark scenario which I sincerely hope will not come true. In a few weeks or maybe even a few months we will know more. What has happened and what do I think is going to happen? Just like previous times (with CN Express and EZ Air) an initiative will become visible (call it a 'test balloon'); it will be done with great haste, without too much prior marketing or announcements otherwise. Also now: no advance notification, no itinerary, no overview of fares, etc. No, in about three days we'll start and then we'll see - apparently - who's coming. Not so many people are expected: after all, who knew about it?

If all the intended target groups were approached effectively and some effort is made to get the best possible aircraft occupancy, then - as I can imagine - after some run-up the 'break even' point will be reached after which the line will turn out to be profitable. But of course that will not happen: for the ZVK flights (of a medical nature) agreements have probably already been made with EZ Air and not with Winair. The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations has - I suppose - given an occupancy guarantee that will be filled in by personnel of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland (with a head office

¹ <https://koninkrijk.nu/2020/11/27/rijk-zorgt-voor-tijdelijke-vliegverbinding-bonaire-en-st-eustatius/>

² <https://bes-reporter.com/index.php/2020/11/27/bonaire-and-statia-get-temporary-air-connection/>

³ For me, this decision comes out of the blue. The government commissioner must be familiar with this development. We now have an island council on the island. *Would it be involved in this development?* Without knowing exactly, I doubt it. After all, transparency and communication are not the strong points of the current administration on St. Eustatius.

⁴ Are there (publicly available) evaluation reports of this? Which findings have led to which corrective measures? What results were intended and what were achieved?

on Bonaire and a responsibility that extends to Saba and St. Eustatius). And with that Winair is satisfied.

Winair itself (or: the main shareholder: the government of St. Maarten) has no interest whatsoever in flights that do not pass through St. Maarten (think of landing rights: income for the government) and will do everything in its power to make the initiative fail without being blamed. This will become "too few passengers" or "not profitable" otherwise. The other shareholder (the European Dutch government) sees this passively and lets it happen (something with Pontius Pilate: washing hands in innocence) instead of giving up her own interest in Winair and actively working for open competition on air connections in the Dutch Caribbean.

The saying goes "with such friends you don't need enemies anymore" and that seems to me to apply here as well. The central government and also the government commissioner on St. Eustatius present the development as if the connection to Bonaire had been 'fought' by them, but - as I firmly believe - this is not a fought result at all; rather, it is an example of letting hang the ears to the monopolist Winair and the major shareholder St. Maarten.

It fits into this picture that no effort is made to see whether the flights are actually competitive, in the sense that they connect well with onward flights to the United States and to Europe (e.g. Amsterdam). If it is still necessary to spend the night on Bonaire, passengers with a destination further than 'just' Bonaire will make the comparison between a ticket price with or without an overnight stay, after which Sint Maarten will still be chosen (as Winair would like to see).

In order to optimize the occupancy, I believe that the ZVK flights should also be included in the regular connection between St. Eustatius and Bonaire. Where I assume that also the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the HRH will focus on Bonaire when it comes to the function "regional hospital".

Of course, I sincerely hope that my darkly sketched image of the future will not be realized and that the interim evaluations will actually lead to a customer-friendly image with appropriate rates and programming, but for the time being I am gloomy (based on - as already mentioned - previous experiences of a similar nature).

In short, may I ask you to keep your finger on the pulse and lead it there:

- an open competition will arise in the market for Caribbean air connections (by dismantling Winair's monopoly position and divesting the European Dutch government's interest in Winair);
- affordable fares and a frequent and direct flight schedule can be obtained between St. Eustatius on the one hand and Bonaire on the other hand;
- in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the "regional hospital" in Bonaire will be deployed after which the contracts with Colombia and Sint Maarten can be phased out (in favor of Bonaire and of course to the extent that Bonaire can actually fulfill all care tasks; if this is not possible for the time being, focus on realizing that goal instead of maintaining care contracts with Sint Maarten and Colombia);
- in general: the dependency of Sint Maarten (for Sint Eustatius) is reduced where it is unnecessary when it is easier to 'switch' between all BES partners, and with Bonaire in particular.

I conclude by wishing you much wisdom.

Kind regards,

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cc: *Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission*
Chairman and members of the Committee on Public Health, Welfare and Sport
Government commissioner on St. Eustatius