

Dear Chairman and members of the Commission on Kingdom Relations,

From the report of the working visit of State Secretary Knops I, living on and involved in the ups and downs of St. Eustatius, focussed on the part that regulates the visit to St. Eustatius.

No words are spent at all on the risky entrance of the visit (of the Secretary of State with his entourage) to the vulnerable island (risky in view of covid-19). Nothing appears to have happened afterwards but I compare that with the running across a busy highway like - for example - the A13 between The Hague and Rotterdam. Let's suppose that the crossing (wo)man reaches the other side unscathed then in principle nothing has happened. However, nobody will deny that it was a risky act. Well, that is also the case here. Reading the report it seems to me that there is actually nothing that justifies such a physical visit. Getting acquainted with the members of the newly elected Island Council could, of course, also have been excellently done by means of a videoconference-meeting.

I read about the progress of the work from 132 (unspecified) projects which are in a certain stage of readiness: one project a bit further than the other. As an interested resident of St. Eustatius I am actually curious about which projects it is about and what the bottlenecks are. There is no communication at all about these projects on the island, at least not in the sense that the population gets something out of them. If I hadn't read the Kamerbrief it would have gone all the way past me.

Procedurevergadering vaste commissie voor Koninkrijksrelaties

Deze vergadering moet nog plaatsvinden

[Bekijk dagoverzicht](#)

16 december 2020
16:30 - 17:00 uur

Zaal: Tilanuskamer
Commissie: Koninkrijksrelaties

Agendapunten

- 1 **Brievenlijst**
- 2 **Wijziging van de begrotingsstaat van Koninkrijksrelaties voor het jaar 2020 (Vijfde incidentele suppletore begroting inzake derde tranche steunmaatregelen Curaçao en Aruba)**
Te behandelen:
[35641 Begroting d.d. 19 november 2020 - K.H. Ollongren, minister](#)

Home > Governance > News

5 news items on Governance [Show filters](#)

Sort by: [Date](#) / [Relevance](#)

- [Relocation of the Government main office](#)
Several government offices on St. Eustatius are being relocated in order to accommodate the return of the Island Council.
News item | 03-12-2020 | 18:58
- [Law Restoration of the provisions unanimously passed in the Senate](#)
On Tuesday July 7th, the law Restoration of the Provisions for the Administration of the Public Entity of St. Eustatius was ...
News item | 09-07-2020 | 19:24

Public meetings of the Island Council or the Executive Council are not announced in a broad sense and underlying documents are not publicly available anywhere. To illustrate this point I have taken two pictures.

The first one is familiar to you and concerns a detail of the agenda of your committee meeting of 16 December 2020: complete with underlying and clickable documents.

Below that there is a detail from the (renewed!) website of the Public Entity St. Eustatius. On the news page in the 'governance' section I see that on July 9th there is a report of the Restoration Act that passed the Senate and then on December 3rd there is a report about a relocation of government offices. Nothing seems to have happened in between. No elections, no installation of the Island Council, no first or subsequent meeting. Just nothing!

With the arrival of the current government commissioner in February 2020, transparency of governance and involvement of the population were - according to his own words - of paramount importance. They were nice words, but that is all. Transparency has not (yet?) arrived, as the

illustrations above show, and although there are regular radio broadcasts concerning the covid-19 developments, I do not see that as involvement of the population: the communication in such a broadcast is - by definition - one-sided. Listening, I would say the most important component of the communication process, does not take place at all. In the beginning we sometimes spoke to each other: he called me an involved resident and in that capacity he wants to stay in contact with me. Nowadays my questions or remarks are not answered anymore. Perhaps an involved resident but (positively) critically asked questions do not seem pleasing to him.

In addition to the Island Council there was the Social Advisory Council which would quietly pass into the Civil Participation Council but in one way or another - not clear to me - that transition apparently first needs the consent of the Island Council and as long as the government commissioner does not put that point on the agenda he is assured that no civil interference will hinder him in his somewhat autocratic existence. In a charming way he always keeps the boat off. In this way he does not create any enemies, so seems the strategy, and it all goes exactly the way he wants it. If that is a good basis for a longer term cooperation with the population in general and with the Island Council in particular? Time will tell...

An example? In my conversation with him, I once expressed my concern about the recognition in the European Netherlands of the CXC-diploma (CSEC) that is obtained here: in the past exam year, the first cohort of students passed this exam and (now partly) flew out the island. He - Mr. Van Rij - promised to use his influence with the right officials in The Hague. I doubt whether this promise has been kept; what I see is that at this moment - mid December 2020 - the CXC-diploma has not even been awarded to the exam candidates of the past year. Maybe no Dutch official can do anything about this (I don't know if and how the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science communicates with the CXC organization) but I don't have the impression that anyone on a certain administrative level and with a Dutch passport has angered The Hague with a fist on the table. Of course, it is all too little to dedicate a parliamentary inquiry to it, but as with the investigation into the functioning of the executing organisations, no one will really feel responsible: it is always up to someone else...

The test balloon of the ferry connection has - as far as I can see - silently deflated: at least I don't hear anything about it anymore. However, some progress has been shown with the air connections. I can't come up with another word for it: all very clumsy. Or, on the contrary, very refined, aimed at their failure without any official having to feel addressed. "Suddenly" there is 'immediately' a connection between St. Eustatius and Bonaire. Neither departure and arrival schedules nor prices are announced and even making a reservation is a bit of a hassle. It is therefore logical that the occupancy of the first flights so far is very low and also a too low frequency with too large aircraft - which have to be hired by Winair (while EZ Air [a BES company!] would probably have been able to do this job competitively with the right equipment and in the right frequency) - all do not contribute to a successful introduction of this connection. We now have to wait for the proverbial plug to be pulled out with the argument "too little interest". If, like Winair, you don't really want this connection and the Dutch government doesn't lift a finger to solve the problems of mobility around the islands of the Caribbean.

Netherlands neatly to solve then everything remains as it was. In other words, flying via Sint Maarten at too high a rate as befits a monopolist. The Dutch government seems to have difficulty in including this traffic in public transport, as is the case with traffic between the mainland and the Wadden Islands. Well, the shirt is closer than the skirt.

I wander off: let me go back to the State Secretary's report. Among the many projects I read: "*Due to the scarcity of quality personnel on the island, the public body mainly needs project managers to bring various, often specialist, projects to a successful conclusion*". Another good reason to fly in a set of European Dutch people who, without a clue about the Stavian culture, are just going to do their Dutch thing. Couldn't it be that many projects are simply too complex? Couldn't it be that simplifying many of those projects could lead to the same desired effect? On the one hand I wonder why everything has to be "Dutch" if necessary, on the other hand I sometimes wonder why some things remain so strictly separated from European Dutch legislation. The case of transfer tax in connection with fuel duty: why not just solve this "Dutch"? I have already brought my lack of understanding for the separate (and not exactly equitable) way of levying income tax to parliamentary attention. But up till now that all seems like pearls on my part being thrown to the proverbial pigs on your part (apologies for this comparison: please do not take it too literally ;-)

Finally, I read about the State Secretary's introduction to the newly installed members of the Island Council. With respect to the PLP I read from an explanation on their part about what is meant by autonomy and about their desire for cooperation with the Dutch government. I see the wish for cooperation as an outstretched hand which is not answered by the State Secretary other than a corrective remark meant. I have not been there but I can hardly imagine that "intentions" have been explained by the PLP which lie outside the legal frameworks. It draws the regentess character that the Dutch government shows: "*color within the lines, I don't want to hear anything else about it*". The sentence: "*I made it clear that there can be no question of more autonomy than the law allows*" does not, in my opinion, at all demonstrate a sincere interest in the Stavian government, nor do I see it as a tactful way of answering the outstretched hand of the PLP.

Well, so far a reflection on my part. I hope that this may contribute to your discussion in the upcoming procedural meeting in which the visit of the State Secretary to the Caribbean part of the Kingdom is on the agenda as item 12 ("Report working visit..."). As always, I wish you much wisdom. When this wisdom is accompanied by a critical attitude, I believe it should lead to a successful result.

Kind regards,

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

Cc: Government Commissioner on St. Eustatius