

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations of the Senate,

First of all I would like to thank you for still including the information I sent you in your contribution to the debate. To be honest, I thought at first that I would never be able to do that again, but when I saw some very warm reactions the next day (i.e. the day of the debate), I was happy and satisfied all the same.

I followed the debate on the Internet with interest. In my opinion an important point concerns communication. As I have already argued, it is fairly poor and in any case not with the people of Statia. In the opinion of the government (my words!) this is only inconvenient: imagine that something comes out of this that you do not want and that you then suddenly have to take into account. Just inconvenient.

Note: In my active and operational career as a sailing naval officer, I did hear from a Hague official who felt that the administrative process in The Hague would be a lot easier without all those ships whose management comes up with all sorts of questions about repairs, items to be sent, training to be followed, etc. But then again, the sailing units are, of course, the very reason for the Navy's existence. In short, a funny - and similar! - observation in my opinion.

As for the townhall meetings the following. As I have already explained, I envision such a meeting being held once or twice a month and discussing developments in the path of:

- the future of the island (where is it going, where will we be in five or ten years, which milestones do we recognize in the short and medium term);
- the relationship with The Hague (somewhere in the spectrum from fully independent - within or outside the Kingdom - to full integration into the country of The Netherlands, as was done for example with the French "Overseas Countries and Territories").

In those meetings you can then consult with all those present.

Here, by the way, the following should be borne in mind. The average Statian is not highly educated and certainly not used to talking about anything, let alone in the context of the "general interest". In my experience, a townhall meeting or ten or twenty will pass before any substantial result is discussed. In the beginning I expect it to be about "your cow broke my fence" and more "take my case" issues.

If I were responsible for it, I would see it as a not always easy challenge to get through this difficult initial period as constructively as possible. It is my belief that after consistently organizing these periodic consultation sessions, it will eventually lead to curiosity and trust. Of course you have to keep the promises you make during these consultation sessions, but you can also expect the same from the other discussion partners. And so one learns by doing how the consultation process can work. But

yes, it starts with trust in each other, respect for each other and the will to make something of it together.

Following the debate, I checked my agenda. I will not say that my agenda is flawless but I follow developments fairly closely so when there is a townhall meeting I am always there in principle. I was able to find ten townhall meetings in the period from February 2018 to the present. Three of them had to do with the introduction or progress of the intervention by the central government:

- February 7, 2018: introduction of Franco and Stegers by Knops;
- September 23, 2019: Knops introduces the plan of elections under conditions (a few hours after this consultation, the 13-page Parliamentary Letter - September Letter St. Eustatius - was sent: it cannot be otherwise than that it had been ready for a long time: *what consultations...?*);
- February 18, 2020: Van Rij introduces himself as new government commissioner.

None of the other seven townhall meetings focused on consultation but on information transfer (i.e., one-way). The last two (27 January and 6 February 2021) focused on information about vaccination. There were also town hall meetings about the location of a detention center (about which it has been very quiet for a long time now), the construction of the roads (I remember that someone from the audience had a critical question about the drainage of water from the roads; the answer boiled down to the fact that "that station had already been passed" ...), the election process with input from, among others, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities and the Election Council. It was always a consultation focused on information FROM government TO citizen (with perhaps an opportunity for questions, but then only about that specific subject); a consultation in which matters were not yet fixed because they had to be shaped in consultation: that type of consultation has never taken place here. I am now thinking in particular of the two points mentioned earlier (the future of the island and the relationship with The Hague).

This reluctance to enter into substantive consultations is also reflected in the current administration. The law that applied UNTIL July 2020 still had the Social Advisory Board. The new law in effect FROM July 2020 will no longer have this council. The Explanatory Memorandum of the new law mentions a Citizen's Participation Council that should replace it. In my opinion, clever use is made of the fact that the latter council is not literally included in the law but in the Explanatory Memorandum. In any case, the fact is that the Social Advisory Council has since been disbanded and no one has heard of a Citizens' Participation Council here.

Note: In practice, the Social Advisory Board was nothing more than a smokescreen to feign "consultation". Input was not appreciated and therefore not stimulated. Announcements were made that were otherwise long known. A non-conversation.

Currently there is the radio program "Shedding Light" once or twice a week. It contains only news about Covid19 (number of cases, possibility of vaccination, etc.). Here too, there is never any impetus for a substantive discussion (which is difficult in a radio broadcast, of course ...). There are also radio programs in which a political party has its say. To illustrate this I am sending you a link to a radio broadcast in which Charles Woodley (of PLP and at the recent elections the biggest vote-getter for Ubuntu) makes his plea. The broadcast lasts about an hour and my main concern is to bring to your attention how demagogic the message is brought and how unworldly - *for the record: this is a value judgment made with a European Dutch perspective; I am aware of that* - the content of the message is; incidentally, you can also taste the deep, deep frustration and dislike of (colonial) Netherlands. I will not wish you any listening pleasure but it might be good to take note of the way of thinking here and how this thinking is brought to the people. From the Dutch side or from the side of the local government there is nothing in return. The link can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/1196755467105083/videos/2923266111289526/>

Note: Whereas in a large part of the European Netherlands reason predominates in people's thinking, in Statia emotion is much more important. A programme with concrete points about "what we want to achieve", "what are we going to do to achieve it" and "what should it cost" has much less value than a statement like "I am from the island and therefore know what is important to you" (without being more concrete). Call it a difference in paradigm. Sense of these kinds of nuances is very important but oh so easily this sense gets trapped in the heat of a conversation or discussion.

So much for some (additional) clarification on my part. Thank you again for the extensive attention you have given to the Caribbean Netherlands and for your plea for a higher priority for "Kingdom Relations" in a next cabinet term.

Kind regards,

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Cc: Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee of the Lower House