

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

It is now more than two years ago - February 2018 - that St. Eustatius was put under the rule of a government commissioner appointed by "The Hague". We as an island are on the way back to a form of democracy, but in the opinion of "The Hague" we are not there yet. The law that marks that path has some phases and it comes down to the European Netherlands determining when St. Eustatius has met the requirements at any given moment, after which the next phase begins.

It is about that time that I started to write my findings about the developments on the island - I live there - to the Committee on Kingdom Relations of the Lower House (I have put all my letters together on a website accessible to everyone which I consider to be my "writing corner": <http://statia.nu> (the site opens in English but you can switch languages by clicking on the little flag at the top right)). The motivation for this is mainly the fact that the European Netherlands does what it thinks is right and that there is no critical press (as there is in the European Netherlands) which interprets the developments for the benefit of the public. There is no news supply at all here (and certainly no independent one) and many people have to rely on 'hearsay' as far as the local, island news supply is concerned (for example on the radio, where local political parties regularly give their own version of what is happening) or on what people tell each other on Facebook. These kinds of signals hardly ever reach the bodies in The Hague where policy is made or checked.

And well considered, I am also only a single local observer, but one who happens to be able to write letters and does so. In my opinion, the local political parties should also let their opinions be heard, and not only on the local radio, but also in "The Hague" in order to adjust the policy of Kingdom Relations as well as possible in the direction they consider desirable (with the Statian population as their "target group", "objective" or "customer").

In the past this has happened but I have seen that such letters have usually not been processed (e.g. by the addressee minister) because the form was not correct: then some statements were made from which the good reader or interpreter can then derive a message but with the same ease the same (but unwilling) reader can say "well, I was not asked a question so I don't have to respond to this". This is where it goes wrong. On this side of the ocean people say "my letters are not even answered" and on your side of the ocean life just goes on and the Statian letter lies aside.

Note: Up until now, my letters have at best reached the status of "notified" after which they proceed to the order of the day. I see that as a neat way of looking away. But looking away remains looking away.

In my letters to the Senate - related to their debate (April 6) with the State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations about the progress and developments in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom - of which I have sent you a copy you can read what I think about the approach of "The Hague" towards the people of The Netherlands (or: their government). The website 'dossierkoninkrijksrelaties.nl' refers to my letter and quotes it as "arrogant, pedantic and disrespectful". Well, in my view you start your term as Kingdom Relations Committee in this (still to be composed) Cabinet period with a backlog in this area. To date, the intervention has in my view only led to (more) revulsion against the European Netherlands. With thanks to State Secretary Knops and his vassals. It is no different, you and I have to make do with it.

This is mainly about the form: how do the parties deal with each other? I once said that if a profile of a government commissioner were presented to me (in reality, such a thing is not presented to anyone on Statia - in my opinion) then the three most important qualities of such a functionary would have to be 'listening, listening and listening'. But somehow the Secretary of State succeeds time and time again that the official sent here should mainly listen to him and not go into open communication with the Statian people and then 'act' (without further consultation). I ask you to ask yourself: would you want to be treated like this? I estimate that recalcitrance will be stirred up in you too. Take it from me: the Statian is no different.

Once a good (or at least improved) relationship between the Netherlands and Statia has been established, only then will there be a reasonable basis for discussing the content. And as far as I'm concerned, it shouldn't be so much about the infrastructure or the administration(s) as about more fundamental matters. Article 1 in the Constitution says something about the equal treatment that should apply to all Dutch people in equal situations. My question is based on this: why then is there such a different legal infrastructure in the Dutch Caribbean compared to the European Netherlands. In that context I note that I think the construction of 'Public Entity' is great: very flexible, 'own' island matters can be arranged in an island way (in terms of the Cup-a-Soup advertising: more islands should do that...). My personal approach would then be - I have not discussed this with others so here too some restraint is appropriate - that the basis for the entire (European and Caribbean) Netherlands is identical and where climate, the small scale of the island, the English language of instruction at school or other (e.g. culturally oriented) aspects demand this, the regulations are laid down in an 'own' island way. And then - again: in my opinion - not for the BES territory but separately per island!

I would like to discuss this in more detail with you, but not yet. For I see two points that bother me in this regard. First of all, I do not know how you will receive this letter. Will you take it as read and proceed to the order of the day or will you make the Statian policy a fixed or periodically recurring agenda item in which 'our' island matters can be discussed? Further (or: secondly), to date I am speaking in a personal capacity using terms such as "in my opinion". In one way or another, this letter should also contribute to a situation in which other Stadians can also have their input. You may have ideas of your own on how to give such a situation further shape.

I am looking forward to the follow-up.

With kind regards,

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