

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

Below are four current developments (without wanting to be exhaustive). Consecutively, a brief consideration of...

- vaccinations;
- good governance according to law with two illustrations:
 - connectivity;
 - services by banks and notaries;
- poverty;
- health care.

This reflection can provide background for your upcoming consultations as a Commission.

VACCINATIONS

With regard to the COVID19 vaccinations on St. Eustatius, I too am saddened by the fact that the willingness to be vaccinated is moderate, to say the least. In my email of March 9th I note that after the necessary details about the vaccination were known in the fall of 2020, the first information on the island will not take place before the beginning of February 2021, a week or two before the first Moderna injection (as of February 22nd 2021). By then, the conspiracy theories have been widely shared on Facebook on the island. *And these theories remain unrefuted by the local government all this time.* So there is a huge backlog of information. Only when two teachers from Saba School of Medicine were invited by the island government to provide information did a turnaround become noticeable (which, incidentally, now seems to have stopped). These two teachers also provide information in the churches. In short, the 'sense of urgency' - certainly in the autumn of 2020 - is not felt so strongly by the government commissioner!

Note: I get the impression that the opposition to vaccination seems to be focused on mRNA technology. Vaccines based on a traditional manufacturing process (e.g., Astra Zeneca) seem to face less resistance locally.

GOOD GOVERNANCE UNDER THE LAW

At the committee debate on May 26, State Secretary Knops said at one point (it was about the airport of St. Maarten), "*good governance is about everything*". And also "*What is happening now is that one wants to artificially separate it all by saying: it is a different trajectory. [...] Of course that cannot be separated; that is the point. ...] I do have to operate correctly according to the law and good governance. That this leads to tensions, that's true. But in administrative relationships there are two parties that have a responsibility in this*".

The phasing according to which democracy returns to St. Eustatius is not regulated in the Restoration of St. Eustatius Act itself, but in the Explanatory Memorandum (especially section 3.2.8 "schematic representation of phasing" on pages 18 and 19). In the same Explanatory Memorandum, I read on pages 9 and 10 about the existence of a Citizen Participation Council that would be set up after the

elections (of October 21, 2020). Never heard of it again. In addition, there is the consultation referred to as "Central Dialogue" in which topics of socio-economic significance are discussed between government, Chamber of Commerce, employers (and employees?).

In the consultation of June 2 (about St. Eustatius), State Secretary Knops uses the term "within and outside the framework of the law" more than once. In any case, he considers the input he received from the Island Council during his visit to St. Eustatius as "outside the framework of the law".

The law itself does not mention any criteria, they are only listed in the Explanatory Memorandum and were first outlined in the progress report of November 14, 2018. The Commission of Wise Men had already indicated that there were points of attention on the Statian side as well as on the European Dutch side. The points of attention with a European Dutch responsibility have now completely disappeared from view and seem to have returned somewhat to the Island Council document (i.c. "Proposal Route Restoring Democracy.pdf"; attached).

Note: If the twelve criteria are so important (in the view of the State Secretary), why are they not prioritized in the project overviews? In a letter to you dated April 20, 2019 (six months after the twelve criteria were announced), I have already noted that there is no good match to be made between the project overview on the one hand and the twelve criteria on the other. Let alone that these twelve criteria can be actively managed.

To characterize the points brought forward by the Island Council as "outside the framework of the law" (at least, this is how I understand the words of the State Secretary) seems to me to be somewhat short-sighted. When, *for example*, should connectivity be addressed? The government commissioner (encouraged by a motion of the Island Council) has (perhaps?) brought up the issue in his contacts with the European Netherlands, but this has not had any visible effect on the public so far.

"*Good governance is about everything*"; I can hear the State Secretary saying it so clearly on May 26th...

Connectivity: Winair -- Titan -- EZ Air

From the side of the Government Commissioner and the State Secretary nothing at all is heard about this. In a hastily drafted and otherwise absolutely inadequate document Titan.pdf (attached) the "alternative carrier" EZ Air (*nota bene a company from the Caribbean Netherlands, established on Bonaire*) is completely left out of consideration. This airline could neatly maintain the connections between Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba. St. Maarten too can be served by EZ Air but then it would help if the European Netherlands would commit to the Caribbean Netherlands and not stick to its ownership of approx. 8% of Winair that in practice only serves two purposes: the own Winair wallet and the state coffers of St. Maarten.

Note: In medical emergencies a helicopter is on standby to bring patients from Saba and St. Eustatius to St. Maarten if necessary. But although such a helicopter can of course - in the best interest of the

patient - fly on to the hospital on St. Maarten (with parking place) it must first, if necessary, land on the airport after which the patient is transported further by ambulance. I can think of no other motivation for this than that in this way St. Maarten can collect landing fees.

I would rather see the policy changed yesterday than today: The European Netherlands renounces its share in the ownership of Winair and subsequently stands up for the interests of the Dutch Caribbean instead of those of Winair and Sint Maarten. More or less automatically EZ Air (Bonaire) will then come into the picture, so is my firm belief.

Services by banks and notaries

Another point raised by the Island Council, as if the European Netherlands still had an action point, concerns the services by banks and notaries. Here too, a motion was passed encouraging the government commissioner to lead the way to having banking services on St. Eustatius under the supervision of De Nederlandsche Bank (instead of by the current Windward Island Bank (WIB), falling under the supervision of the Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten. This point seems to be at a complete standstill. Is it weird then that the Island Council is including this item in the list of action items of the European Netherlands?

With regard to the notarial services, the Government Commissioner has already reported to me once: *"Notwithstanding the fact that the option you have raised is worth exploring, it does not offer a solution at present"*. This is not so much a thought on my part as it is a reference to legislation existing as of July 1, 2015 (i.e., the BES Notary Act)! *In short, if we still want to stay within the framework of the law, what are we doing with notaries on Sint Maarten and with a government commissioner who wants to stick to this.*

POVERTY

On Sunday, February 21, 2016, there is a broadcast of "Lubach on Sunday" in which the relationship with the Dutch Caribbean is explained (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3OCiF61ccU>). In a humorous way the dilemma is clearly outlined. Money from the Netherlands and control on the island by the islanders. For the record: this film was made well before the intervention.

The Constitution defines the Public Entity in article 132a as an administrative entity for which "own" laws and regulations can be drawn up. Paragraph 4 of this article states: *"For these public entities, rules may be laid down and other specific measures taken with a view to special circumstances which make these public entities substantially different from the European part of the Netherlands"*.

It seems to me that things like climate (tropical), geographical location (in a hurricane area) and the language of instruction in schools (English for Saba and St. Eustatius) are obvious aspects that should be understood under "substantially different from the European Netherlands". Whether this is also the case for matters such as minimum wage, AOW, welfare, unemployment etc. I find questionable. In my

opinion, a "less" framework is too easily applied here for the Caribbean Netherlands (than for the European Netherlands) with the intention that it all should not become too expensive, of course. Research has shown that the standard of living here should still be referred to as "below the subsistence minimum" and somehow it seems to be maintained that way.

At the same time, the tax regime here is based on a "flat fee" (everyone pays the same rate in percentage terms, except for the very high earners: in the case of an income over US\$ 250,000 per year). If the same rate is applied as in the European Netherlands (i.e. progressive increasing) then for the vast majority of residents the tax to be paid remains the same and low. For those who earn more, the contribution to the tax increases. The Gini factor will decrease proportionally and the differences in income will be reduced accordingly. At the same time the to be collected tax will increase.

Setting these two facts against each other (benefits and taxes to be regulated in accordance with the European Netherlands) seems to me to be beneficial for the local population (in the entire Dutch Caribbean). A calculation should be able to give a definite answer to this.

In addition, I suggest that you consider - as an experiment - the introduction of a guaranteed "basic income" (without obligations) on St. Eustatius to see if the prosperity and happiness of the people will increase.

HEALTHCARE

The Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland (RCN) has silently removed the information on health insurance for Caribbean Dutch students. This was of course incorrect (notwithstanding the fact that State Secretary Blokhuis still stated in writing on July 6, 2020 "*The insurance from the Dutch Caribbean can therefore be seen as a privileged position compared to fellow students from the European Netherlands*". Big nonsense!). Anyway, on the website there is nothing more to be found about it, so that seems like a good development. In practice, it seems to me that the Caribbean Dutch student in the European Netherlands is excellently off with a NL health insurance in combination with the granting of care allowance.

There has been some discussion about the gynecologist on St. Eustatius. In my opinion unjustly she is completely excluded in the health care circuit and preference is given to the gynecologist who is connected to the hospital on St. Maarten. Why? I don't know. As far as I can judge (but I am a layman, not introduced to medical matters) the Statian gynecologist is BIG registered and trained in NL (at the University of Maastricht) and has gained international experience. In my opinion, care with regard to gynecology on the island can be set up considerably more efficiently when she is seen as a full-fledged force instead of a competitor of Sint Maarten. Local people would then no longer have to fly to St. Maarten (and back), which seems to me to be a great advantage especially with pregnant women. The only thing it does not have is the hospital facility but it can provide everything else.

Another point of discussion concerns the point - also raised by the Island Council - of dialysis for kidney patients. Although reports have been made about this (which I do not have) it seems to me fairly obvious that this is an investment with a certain payback. After all, dialysis has to take place periodically and each time there are flight costs involved. These are all avoidable if investment is made in equipment and personnel for the locally performed dialysis. It even seems to me that not only locally (on St. Eustatius) can the benefits be reaped, but perhaps more broadly: Saba and St Kitts and Nevis can also have kidney dialysis performed on St. Eustatius.

Well, it seems to me that I have again provided enough food for thought for the discussions ahead.

As always, I wish you much wisdom in your deliberations.

Kind regards,

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Attachments:

1. Proposal Route Restoring Democracy.pdf
2. Titan.pdf