

Sint Eustatius, October 14, 2021.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

Maybe I am too optimistic, maybe I am wrong, but today two things came together. Like two puzzle pieces that had been out of focus for a long time and suddenly you saw how they should be laid. Today there was a meeting of the Island Council on the one hand and a debate on the Kingdom Relations budget in the House of Representatives on the other. I tried to follow them both; there was some overlap in time, but still: as an observer with internet you can follow both reasonably well. When it comes to Sint Eustatius I saw how the State Secretary for Kingdom Relations tried to blacken the Island Council in the House of Representatives, as if it were the cause of the failure to energetically pick up the conditions that had to be met in order to make the next step in the situation of "restoration of democracy" (or: in line with the name of the relevant law, "restoration act government Sint Eustatius").

About 7000 km southwest of European Netherlands, there was that same Island Council of Sint Eustatius in consultation with the Government Commissioner. What I saw there was not at all in line with the suggested vilification of the Island Council by the State Secretary. It was rather the other way around. The Island Council was very angry and dismayed about the behavior of the Government Commissioner who demonstrably (and demonstrated by the relevant articles of law!) acts unlawfully, delaying and concealing. The Island Council is structurally kept in the dark <sup>1</sup> when it comes to transparency in information. And in reports of the government commissioner to the State Secretary, the Island Council is always blamed. This was also literally stated as such.

The good thing about this is that where it concerns 'cooperation' within the Island Council, a common enemy has now been found and it seems as if former bipartisans in the Island Council are now becoming each other's allies. If that momentum can be maintained then good things are bound to come out of it. That promises something for the future. But the future is still a long way off, and the feeling of being muzzled and representing the residents with their arms tied behind their backs is, for now, widely manifest.

My hypothesis (I have no evidence for it but at the same time none of my observations contradict it) is as follows. The mantra is that the intervention will be as short as possible and as long as necessary. The question then naturally arises: necessary, for whom or what? Then my hypothesis comes around the corner. Mr. Barnhoorn is investing heavily: the man of the rose nursery in Africa; BNNVARA/Zembla made a documentary at the time about how he made a lot of money and how

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<sup>1</sup> I have reported before how this was called at a previous employer of mine, "*The mushroom routine: keep them in the dark and feed them with shit*".

people and animals were left in the drought, because a river was 'diverted' for the benefit of the water-guzzling flower nursery. Not exactly an image with which kindness or involvement with the island and its inhabitants is or becomes a credible item. Moreover, Mr. Barnhoorn is a barely visible figure on the island: in his eyes the island is probably nothing more or less than a business model. Investors were attracted at the time by the CDA (under the leadership of Mr. Balkenende) to - among other things - invest in Sint Eustatius whereby the administrators keep them free from red tape such as the necessary permits and quarantine for "essential workers". For example, a large plot of trees was 'just cut down' to create the construction site for the resort. Meanwhile, even a road has been shoveled to the coast: of course without consulting the nature conservation organization Stenapa. The only beneficiaries of these investments are the investors themselves; the island does not gain anything from them. So "as long as necessary" might just be: "as long as it takes the investors to have reached the 'point of no return'". What the goal is I don't know, but it seems like investors are aiming for some kind of Saint Barths: a playground for the very rich. But then again, it's only a hypothesis, of course....

The frustration of the House of Representatives, and particularly of Ms. Kuiken, is great, and I share that frustration wholeheartedly. After all, how can it be that in eleven years something decent has not been put in place to eliminate poverty. Paraphrasing the National Ombudsman: the MPs allow themselves to be tricked by the Cabinet time and time again. For the record: my frustration is not directed at the MPs but at the absolute arrogance that oozes from the actions of this government. Effortlessly the wallet is drawn for European Dutch needs for a multiple of what is needed here to keep the poverty out. Of course it is good to look at the cost side and to make (especially small) steps but on balance there is still poverty after all this time. And of course the previous cabinet did very little, and of course this cabinet has taken steps, but as yet, after eleven years, the problem has not been solved. The same amazement applies to the financial administration, which is in danger of not being put in order: it is a community of about three thousand people, not exactly a 'big deal' you might say. But somehow neither the own organization nor all the hired help manages to get the financial administration sustainably in order. Isn't it time to talk about "unwillingness" (of the cabinet)?

With the motion that must ensure that a BSN is introduced in the Dutch Caribbean, I see the same kind of unwillingness. Laws must be changed and what not. I would think: the BSN is taken for granted in the European Netherlands, so perhaps nothing needs to happen in terms of legislation. Why separate laws and regulations for something that is already legally embedded and fully operational in the Netherlands? Just apply it one to one and do not provide it with special BES legislation. There is no ground (I refer here to paragraph 4 in article 132a of the Constitution) on which one can say that one needs own local laws and regulations. Yes, the current administration is probably not in line with that in the European Netherlands but those are surely not the distinguishing differences to which just cited article of the Constitution refers. This is simply 'willfully' maintaining a difference (a disadvantage?)!

Although not included in the budget deliberation of October 14, 2021 but mentioned on the website of DossierKoninkrijksrelaties.nl (on October 12), concerns the mail delivery in the Dutch Caribbean. One of the points mentioned in the sphere of 'causes' concerns the flight connections between the BES islands, frequent or not. I have previously reported my position on this to you: Winair is a monopolist and is maintained by the two owners, namely the country 'Sint Maarten' (ca 92%) and the country 'The Netherlands' (ca 8%). And now seemingly nothing is allowed to happen that disturbs the status of Winair, while a company like EZ Air in combination with SXM Airways seems to have competitively ready an offer with which Winair can easily be replaced as far as the intra-island connections between Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are concerned. That now seems to many, including the State Secretary and the Minister of I&W, to be a step too far. Who will benefit from it all (probably mainly the island owner of Winair), but by no means the inhabitants of Sint Eustatius. They only see an overpriced connection with an unreliable partner like Winair. Moreover, in all respects they remain completely dependent on Sint Maarten for transport and thus deprived of good and affordable air connections to other destinations in the region.

Anyway, my writing seems to be a kind of "pearls before swine" in this respect because no matter what happens: the connections from Sint Eustatius seem to improve little. Or it must be the ferry connection which probably has the same investor lobby as mentioned earlier and which is mainly aimed at tourist traffic from Sint Maarten (as also confirmed by the government commissioner!) and which therefore does not benefit the population of Sint Eustatius. It is my "prediction" that this ferry connection, once the government subsidy is terminated, will soon die a soft death.

Finally, a finding in connection with the increase of the minimum wage in which Sint Eustatius is not mentioned, allegedly because the Central Dialogue would have advised against it. Isn't it true that it is precisely the government that sets boundaries within which the Central Dialogue can negotiate? Just as - in my opinion - in the European Netherlands the minimum wage is also not the result of this or that collective bargaining agreement (in Dutch: CAO-negotiations).

With kind regards,

J.H.T. (Jan) Meijer MSc MBA,  
Bellevue Road 4, Upper Round Hill,  
Sint Eustatius, Dutch Caribbean.