

St. Eustatius, October 20, 2021.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

Quite often I pick up my pen to provide you with my findings, observations and analyses. I do so always in the full conviction that by doing so I am doing you - and indirectly the population of Statia - a service. After all, there is no objective news gathering here (on St. Eustatius); there is no newspaper and there are no critical journalists. The Daily Herald - a newspaper of St. Maarten - still publishes a picture or an article once in a while but the input of independent and critical journalists is limited. And in the absence of this, it is always a matter of waiting to see how the editors weigh the copy that comes in and consider it newsworthy (not to mention the principle of hearing both sides of the argument). I am just one of the writers, not a journalist. And then it can happen - very understandable by the way - that the weight of the (spokesman of the) government commissioner is greater than that of the authors of other incoming material. For the record, I myself don't write very much to The Daily Herald; I value it more to inform members of the House of Representatives directly.

When I wrote my letter of October 14 last - I must confess - violence was done to the to me quite important, if not 'sacred', premise that the government always claims the truth. The news coverage of - for example - the Benefits Affair - in European Netherlands - and the role that the government (Council of Ministers, Tax Administration, etc.) plays in it has, of course, once again forced my nose to the grindstone but somehow I try to hold on to the general view that most people are alright and that the government is a reliable body.

However, during the recent meeting of the Island Council, it was actually argued and based on articles of law that the government commissioner has her own spin on reality and is not acting in the best interest of the people. She is nothing more or less than a stooge of the Secretary of State and serves only his interest and thus his agenda, according to which investors must be kept free from such things as employees being audited on covid, transparency in plans and permits and anything else about which awkward questions can be asked. Thus I formulated a hypothesis in my previous letter. Via media such as DossierKoninkrijksrelaties.nl, BES-reporter and Koninkrijk.nu these messages of course also come to the notice of Statians here on the island and even of Statians and interested parties otherwise who meanwhile live and work elsewhere.

And so it could happen that I was mentioned on Facebook (where I don't even have an account) as saying nothing but bad things about Statia and that it would be better if I left soon (to where I come from) ¹. Mostly by people with whom I have not exchanged a word and of whom I believe that they and I do not know each other at all. For the record: I am a great advocate of debate, in which a certain consensus is reached between interlocutors on the basis of arguments and opinions. In that sense, I

¹ The reader will easily bring the name Clyde van Putten to mind because he has often shown himself to be an interpreter of what is felt on the island. Sometimes I think that the State Secretary came to the intervention in response to his "angry statements" made publicly at the time. In response, "*no, it was not Clyde van Putten*".

am also a great proponent of so-called townhall meetings here on the island in which fundamental questions, at least questions relevant to the course to be taken, the strategy to be adopted and the future to be pursued, are discussed here on the island. They simply do not take place. They are discussed only in back rooms and at great distances, not with Statians.

But, and this is followed by an important observation (at least in my opinion): here two paradigms collide from which reality is perceived. On the one hand, there is the socioeconomic paradigm (with which I myself try to view the world) and which therefore involves issues such as education, health care, life and income (including the discussion around the social minimum and minimum income), etc. On the other hand, there is the cultural paradigm that starts from the human being in his living environment and assigns values to it. My own view is that - as far as I am concerned - everyone is equal and that discussions between discussion partners must take place on the basis of equal and objective information available to all parties. Mutual respect and - as mentioned - mutual equivalence are values that are highly valued by me.

But in the said cultural paradigm there are also people who assign a particularly high value to "own people first" (which is contrary to mutual equality and respect). So in this case assuming "Statia for the Statians" based on the ideology of *Blut und Boden* which became a major component of the National Socialist ideology from which World War II and the Holocaust could emerge just under one hundred years ago. In this paradigm, therefore, it is possible for people to say "I know what is good for us (you) because, after all, I am from here" or "Those people should go away: after all, they are not from here and therefore have no right to speak." In this paradigm respect also seems to be something that one is entitled to, not automatically something that one should show towards others.

I would like to emphasise that in this text I am not making a value judgement about any paradigm (except that in my letters up to now I have taken the socio-economic paradigm as my starting point). At the most, I note that in the various discussions people speak from a world of their own experience, which may or may not include explicitly defined starting points or axioms. From a cultural paradigm it may therefore be quite normal that strict rules are applied to those from outside who want to live and work here and - conversely - that people naturally have the right to live cheaply because they were born and raised on Statia (and perhaps by now have enough income or assets to move on to a more expensive home).

And likewise it can happen that the government commissioner (who originates from Statia) is forced to implement and propagate a policy from the European Netherlands (that in a socio-economic sense is not automatically favorable for the Statian people); a policy about which I write negatively precisely because it is not automatically favorable for the Statian people (and is partly based on inaccuracies). Well, and then there are "faithful of the Government Commissioner" on Facebook who see my letters as 'slander' rather than that the same people really address the content (I would venture to guess that the publicists on Facebook have not read any of my letters, but have been encouraged to act this way by a team of 'spinners' in the entourage of both the Secretary of State and the Government

Commissioner. For the record, the sentence begins with "I would simply venture to assume..."). By the way, my letters are all at <http://statia.nu>.

Part of the reason for this discussion is the proposed increase of the minimum wage on Bonaire and Saba where St. Eustatius is not mentioned. I have read the letter and the underlying report of the Central Dialogue and I see that this Dialogue sees at most room for an increase of the minimum wage with the inflation rate, in conjunction with other measures. So much for the facts. But yes, now the Statian people are starting to grumble and now suddenly there would be a misunderstanding. Well, 'spinning' is also a profession. By the way, I would like to make a comment: wouldn't it be right to legally define the framework within which the Central Dialogue consults with a government-set minimum wage? Or should the minimum wage be the result of the collective bargaining with which I would compare the Central Dialogue. It is otherwise quite coincidental that the Central Dialogue of Saba and that of Bonaire, completely independent of each other both come to the proposal of an increase of 10%. But yes, it is possible of course...

What to do next? Well, that is also an open question for me. I keep writing about my observations, which I then try to interpret with a proper motivation and with all this I face the world. Those who explain this as slander I challenge not so much to have the debate via Facebook but to approach me (j.m@jhtm.nl) for a discussion on whatever subject I bring up. The debate via Facebook (again, on which I do not have an account myself) is moody and cowardly: a practice that occurs frequently among bullying students who are often too afraid to enter into a real conversation ("face to face") in all openness.

So much for a reaction to what I think I see and feel.

Kind regards,

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Cc: *National Ombudsman*
National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism