

St. Eustatius, November 19, 2021.

Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

It is still during Mr. Van Rij's Government Commissariat that I am invited by him to speak on some matters concerning St. Eustatius. It was on the occasion of such a conversation that he stressed to me that St. Eustatius did not play an important role in the project *ferry connection in the Dutch Caribbean*. No, that would mainly be a matter pulled by Saba. St. Eustatius follows the developments rather passively.

How different is the information from Your Chamber. The departments of SZW, I&W and BZK are enthusiastic about the activities as undertaken by among others the Government Commissioner of St. Eustatius in order to get the ferry connection with Saba and St. Maarten off the ground.

And now it is almost time. Just a few more imperfections to iron out about customs and the military police and then the champagne will be opened, at least for those who see the ferry as a kind of salvation.

When asked, however, no one can demonstrate with solid research that there is a real need for such a ferry. It is mainly arguments that are "additional" (such as: tourists from St. Maarten can easily (more easily) reach St. Eustatius) that tip the balance. In any case, not the fact that the Statian population has a need for this now.

Note: It is again and again St. Maarten and Winair that seem to be 'unjustly' at the table here. Unjustified because in the Caribbean Netherlands it is primarily about the good, frequent and affordable connection between the BES islands (i.e. Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba) perhaps supplemented with the nearby St. Kitts. Arguments like notary, land register and bank on St. Maarten are improper considering the fact that St. Maarten is an independent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The ferry is also 'praised' by the Ministry of I&W as a welcome addition in the connections between the Dutch Caribbean islands (*huh? Bonaire is not mentioned at all...!*). For all parties it is better when the Dutch Caribbean concentrates on the three islands that comprise it and the dependence on St. Maarten is mitigated. It would be worth it to me if this argument is also given some weight in your considerations.

You don't have to have gone through school directly to see that the air connections as EZ Air has them available (in conjunction with SXM Airways) are downright competitive with the Winair offering that maintains BES connectivity with oversized aircraft that are leased by them, nota bene (and then also on improper grounds). If efficiency, effectiveness, meeting the wishes of the population (although in the area of affordability steps can still be made) do not lead to a proper consideration, then almost improper and invisible arguments must play a role. It is this impropriety and non-transparency that I wish to denounce time and again.

Today - Friday, November 19, 2021 - there was an Island Council meeting in which this subject (ferry, late commissioning and alternative air connections) was discussed. It was satisfying to see that the Island Council acted with unprecedented unity in the line as described above. A stand was taken against the cabinet position that is indefensible on rational grounds and was nevertheless defended by the government commissioner.

Of course I consider the Caribbean Dutch problems incomparable with abuses in the European Netherlands such as the Toeslagenaffaire. On the other hand, I find it disconcerting how the Caribbean Netherlands, which so easily escapes the daily and critical eye of the media, is in fact a far cry for our government and effective parliamentary oversight of the government's failing policies in many areas is so easily frustrated (the National Ombudsman has also expressed himself in similar terms before).

In short, I express the wish that you are on the side of the people and the Island Council (of St. Eustatius) and that you let common sense prevail in this dossier of connectivity (by air) and do not repeatedly support the trump card drawn by the government of "St. Maarten" (whose unwanted dependence - of St. Eustatius - is repeatedly fostered by the government) and "Winair". Let reason prevail for once and put a stop to activities that only contribute to non-transparent projects based on arguments that are hidden from view.

I would like to conclude by wishing you much wisdom.

Kind regards,

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