

St. Eustatius, February 5, 2022.

I would like to inform you of the following (with respect to St. Eustatius),

The Ombudsman's delegation is here on the island earlier than the State Secretary (in February 2022). I would like to inform both of them of the points of attention listed below. I consider it important to bring these points to their attention because I am convinced that the Government Commissioner, when receiving the State Secretary, is very keen to play "nice" and, in particular, to lead her past some successes on the island. I don't want to take anything away from those successes, but it would be so much more balanced if the less successful points would also be put in the spotlight (and I expect that the government commissioner won't get around to that 'automatically'...).

Dutch in the Netherlands...

St. Eustatius forms - together with Saba and Bonaire - "Caribbean Netherlands" which in turn, in conjunction with "European Netherlands" in totality gives shape to the country "Netherlands" within the Kingdom of the Netherlands (besides the countries St. Maarten, Curacao and Aruba). In this country "the Netherlands" legislation is applicable with the Constitution as a basis. Because the three islands of the Caribbean Netherlands have the status of Public Entities, laws may exist as a result of circumstances in which these Public Entities differ substantially from "the European Netherlands". It seems advisable to ask the Council of State for a further interpretation of this "essential distinction". Too easily - so it is my conviction (and actual observation) - the Central Government seizes upon this point in order to establish or maintain a disadvantage of the Dutch nationals in the Caribbean Netherlands. The construct "minimum subsistence level for the Dutch Caribbean" (or the benchmark for it) is an example of such disadvantage: with the Constitution in hand (especially article 1 and article 132a), the discussion of this subject seems to me to be non-existent (because illegal). Similarly, differences in social benefits (AOV versus AOW, minimum wage, unemployment benefit, etc.) are non-existent, just as these differences also do not exist for - by way of example - the Randstad region and the Wadden Islands.

Emotion versus reason...

The above thought is one that stems from the ratio whereby economic factors contribute to prosperity. In general, this idea seems to me to fit well in the European Netherlands. However, on St. Eustatius (or more broadly: in "The Caribbean") there is also emotion that plays an important role. By way of example I am now thinking of party programs which are formulated by the various parties in the Netherlands and where voters feel an affinity with the program points of precisely this or that party. Here on St. Eustatius, program points play a subordinate role. Much value is attached to arguments like "I know what is good for you because I was born on this island or in the Caribbean region". With arguments from this angle (also by political leaders of this island) people look suspiciously at European Dutchmen who "know everything better" and "just do something, without consultation". Respect and equality (and actually show it!) are of great importance. Take it from me that many

European Dutchmen who were temporarily flown in easily imagine themselves superior to the local population and thus increase the gap between the two Netherlands rather than bridge it.

It would be going a bit far to speak of anti-Dutch sentiment, but I do note that the stereotypical behavior of many European Dutch on the island tends to stir up these sentiments rather than take them away. A built airport or a beautiful (but useless) traffic circle does not change this.

Communication is everything...

This statement will be clear, obvious and self-evident to many. But the government commissioner - apparently - thinks otherwise. Discussions with the population (Sint Eustatius is not that big at all...) about for example "what does the near future of the island look like and how do we get there" do not take place and also the members of the Island Council are kept out of important developments. A not unimportant development is for example the realization of the resort (i.e. the Golden Rock Dive & Nature Resort). Whether or not there is a permit, whether or not there is enforcement, whether or not there are COVID measures: it does not matter to the investor. Fine? Labor inspection? All injustices are shoved under the proverbial carpet with the knowledge of the government commissioner. It seems as if the instruction from The Hague is: "whatever happens, the investor must be able to go about his business undisturbed". This is a shameful abuse of the fact that there is no critical press here to hold these developments against the light. Politicians in The Hague do not want to know anything about the Dutch Caribbean, or rather: they do not want to be bothered by it.

The recent excavations of people from the time of the slave trade (and the West India Company) were stopped after it came to light on the basis of chance observations that SECAR had been working on the excavation project for quite some time. The then government commissioner Van Rij also played a questionable role here and in an underhanded way caused his wife's company to benefit. All this took place before there were any questions or protests from the population. Because of those protests, the government commissioner was forced to give an explanation in a townhall meeting (this was in June 2021). Recently (end of January) the specially installed group of experts (in the field of archaeology and anthropology: the Statia Heritage Research Committee) drew up a report in which they sharply criticized the communication of the government to the population as well as the way in which the Statian population was involved in the research project (not so!). It could just be that the local government is waiting for the protest storm to blow over and then just continues to act disrespectfully. After all, they were only "recommendations" that the SHRC came up with....

Medical care...

It is easily kept under wraps and as long as no disasters occur (I am thinking for example of a COVID outbreak) things seem to go well but in recent years reports have been made about the functioning of health care on the island as well as the ZVK organization but it seems as if nobody is really interested in a well-functioning health organization on the island (no, not even the Ministry of Health!). The hospitaier was "sold" to the public at the time as an IC room in case COVID patients would have to be ventilated here as well. In practice, that hospitaier has been used as storage and office space.

Vaccinations are also now being set there. Our general practitioners are not BIG registered and yet they have been given plenty of time for this: nobody in The Hague is really interested. Colombia is a kind of second- or third-line care for our patients while, if a Colombian doctor wants to establish himself in the European Netherlands as a general practitioner or as a specialist, the necessary additional exams must first be taken, in addition to the already mentioned BIG registration. Who can explain this situation? Probably no one, and if there is any explanation at all, it will be many words without concrete meaning: this is how The Hague treats second-class Dutch citizens.

Connections with the outside world...

If you want to visit another European country from Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands, it is - in general - very affordable nowadays. And also the public transport in the European Netherlands is generally well organized. The distance St. Eustatius to St. Maarten is about fifty kilometers (approximately The Hague-Amsterdam). The only "exit" from the island is through Sint Maarten and to get there you will spend about two hundred and fifty US dollars. Against the background of a low average income level on the island, this means that in practice the residents often compare their stay on the island with the infamous island prison of Alcatraz. In practice, you get off the island very little. The government turns a deaf ear to this fact. The Netherlands believes firmly in St. Maarten's airline: Winair. However, this airline is a monopolist and behaves as such. And although very small steps seem to be taken in the direction that also those connections - comparable to the one between the Dutch mainland and the Wadden Islands - are seen as public transport affordable for everyone. For now, however, no steps have been taken and our monopoly is still as unaffordable as ever. That a company like EZ Air (Bonaire) would like to provide regular and affordable flight services between the BES islands is systematically brushed aside by The Hague as a non-option. Most recently with the alternative of the ferry: the subsidy pot in the Netherlands is being drained and de facto there is no alternative. If the BES islands are to be seen as a single entity, the mutual connections will have to be in order. The ferry satisfies a need for connection with the small neighboring islands, but Bonaire is just under a thousand kilometers away. The need for direct and affordable air connections has also been submitted by motion of the Island Council (about a year ago already) but the idea that the government does anything with a motion is a goof.

Education...

In October 2014, after successful lobbying by local politicians for the English language of instruction in the schools, the Central Government decided to introduce the CXC education as of school year 2015/2016 on St. Eustatius (and Saba: the CXC already existed there). The CXC is the examination institute that has been standardizing education on all English-speaking Caribbean islands for years. You would say that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science had about five years to see the first exam candidates in the CXC arrive in time and to get the regulations - for example regarding the connection to higher education in the Netherlands - ready for them. This has proven to be a utopia. Although there are now regulations, there are still "open ends" for which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is blind and deaf (read: wants to be). So also education - a European Dutch responsibility in terms of its design and embedding in the Dutch education system - is still not

"finished". And students who want to continue studying in the European Netherlands after their exams on the island still have no BSN, no Digid, no DUO study funding, no home, etc. at that time. If you knock on the door of an HBO institution and want help finding a place to live - as happens with attracting foreign students - then suddenly our students are not foreign but Dutch (which is actually correct) and therefore always miss out on the scarce housing. The student is in practice dependent on family or a network otherwise and if you do not have this: well, then you have bad luck (as a second-class Dutchman).

Rounding off...

In conclusion, I note that with the above-mentioned areas of attention I certainly do not claim to be exhaustive: there are probably many other points of attention to be mentioned. I also do not have an order of importance in mind, although I think that if legislation and regulations on this (or these) island(s) are truly Dutch with "a few" justified exceptions (because they are Public Entities), a number of other points may be arranged or dealt with more easily. For the time being there is a lack of real interest and the Dutch Caribbean islands may be "special Dutch municipalities" in a formal sense but in practice they are still mainly "special" and few "Dutch municipalities".

If this note can or may contribute to an improvement of the dialogue between St. Eustatius and the European Netherlands (The Hague) then at least it has not been in vain to take a closer look (if only as an illustration).

I wish all of you - in any case the National Ombudsman and the State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations - much wisdom and decisiveness (in the interest of the - as yet - second-class Dutch citizens).

With kind regards,

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