

St. Eustatius, March 20, 2022.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

In the context of the March 23, 2022 debate on the BES Islands, I am notifying you of some aspects of life on the island of St. Eustatius. I am trying to connect with your agenda, but I am sure it will all be a bit uneven.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Important aspects remain the fight against poverty and the increase of social welfare and the standard of living. When I use as a starting point that St. Eustatius is part of the country "the Netherlands" and may therefore deduce that laws and regulations are the same throughout the country (unless the status of public entity makes "own" laws and regulations applicable), I believe that the discussion around the benchmark of the Caribbean social minimum should be completely dismissed.

All laws and regulations regarding social benefits, minimum wage, the social minimum should have a generic, national, Netherlands-wide character. After all, there are no regional differences within the European Netherlands either. And apart from this legally motivated argument, the years of discussion have not helped the islanders at all. Decision-making in The Hague has only been delayed by it.

Also in other domains, the adage "comply or explain" applies. In the case of an explanation, the argument must, in my view, be traced back to 'being' a public entity in which 'essentially different circumstances' (from those in the European Netherlands) can indeed lead to 'its own legislation and regulations', according to the Constitution (Article 132a). As long as you - rightly - want to stay away from setting up and maintaining second-class Dutch citizens, it seems obvious to me that you should end the existing discussion about the benchmark of the Caribbean social minimum as soon as possible and instead comply with what is applicable nationally.

A pilot where all Stadians (or more broadly: all Dutch Caribbean citizens) enjoy a conditionally free basic income while simultaneously eliminating the various allowances and benefits in the social domain seems to me to be a sensible initiative.

NOTARY AND BANCARIAN SERVICES IN THE DEPENDANCY OF SINT MAARTEN

First, the notarial services. From the past this takes place from St. Maarten. Legislation has already been adapted in this respect: as of July 2015 there is the 'Law on the Notary Profession BES'. But in the day-to-day business, it is still mainly the dependence on St. Maarten that rings the bell here (note, of course, with the consent and cooperation of the government commissioner who, in my opinion, should be pointing the way to the BES legislation). Why a candidate civil-law notary from Bonaire is not permanently present on Saba and St. Eustatius to provide the desired service is a mystery to me.

More words have already been exchanged about the banking service. The ideal situation, in my opinion, is one in which Dutch banks give substance to this service, also in the Caribbean Netherlands (or more specifically: on St. Eustatius). The fact that there is 'experimenting' with a mortgage guarantee on (exclusively) Bonaire is perhaps a result of a targeted lobby. It seems to me that already

privileged Dutchmen who want to buy a house on Bonaire apparently get their way while less articulate (second-class) Dutchmen in the rest of the Dutch Caribbean have to make do with relatively expensive mortgage forms at banks that have a different supervisor than the Dutch Central Bank. How crooked and "second-rate" do you want it....

It seems as if - at least for students - the way to the BSN will now be there (by when?) after which opening a NL bank account could be a natural next step. If the Dutch Caribbean has to leave the dollar for this purpose while simultaneously adopting the euro, this seems to me to be a favorable development in more than one respect.

With regard to these notarial and banking services, there is an unnecessarily large dependency on St. Maarten (which for the notarial part has already been legally corrected but because it has been going on for years as it is, we continue on the wrong path). This undesirable dependency can also be seen in other domains. In particular when it comes to accessibility and care on the island (I will come back to both aspects)

ACCESSIBILITY

When it comes to accessibility, on St. Eustatius we mainly have Winair and recently the ferry. We can be brief about the latter. When you actually ask for figures (which I am sure are not easy to obtain, because, well, then you will also see what everyone on the island already sees and knows: it will then become clear to you that a transport service has been set up here that is more than loss-making), you will be able to see that it is a good thing. It is the Dutch subsidy that makes the foreign Makana Ferry sail. Once that subsidy stops, Makana Ferry stops too. Of course, you could now suggest that this is a personal conviction that has not been further substantiated, and you would be right about that, of course. In a year or two we will probably talk about this again. And then, of course, I'll be happy to repeat this unsubstantiated prediction.

And that's also how it goes with Winair. Only with Dutch funds (loans, leading to a debt to the Netherlands, which will probably be cancelled at some point without much publicity) can Winair continue living on too large a scale. Somehow (and inexplicably to me), European Netherlands is committed to the continued existence of Winair with a service that (far) exceeds its carrying capacity. Where money can be made (e.g. flying to St. Barths) Winair is at the forefront, but a transport obligation at affordable rates for St. Eustatius is only minimally fulfilled. I know people who already know they want to go to European Netherlands in about four months (for example, in the context of family visits) whereby booking KLM is not directly the problem but booking a Winair flight is. Every so often I hear from people who are affected by cancellations or rescheduling of reserved flights (to St. Maarten). Why here not EZ Air - in cooperation with SXM Airways - can or may set up a regular service for flights between the three BES islands I can only explain by obstruction by the government of European Netherlands. I have no indications for this, but if after some investigation it would appear that improper money flows (bribes) are involved, I would not be surprised. And it seems to me that the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, together with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, are of course responsible for this.

Note: With some fanfare, KLM announced a new destination in the Caribbean, namely Trinidad. That this stopover has put an end to the direct connection between St. Maarten and Amsterdam was not mentioned, but is of course a setback. Bonaire does still have a direct connection with Amsterdam; all the more reason to connect the BES islands!

CARE

In a previous letter I spoke of an 'Augias stable' that needs to be cleaned out. Everyone protects the other and the role of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and also that of ZVK seems to me not to be entirely pure here either (in any case not in the service of the optimal implementation of healthcare on the island). The current hospital on the island is nothing more than a poorly organized GP post and it seems to me more luck than wisdom that up until now there has not been a serious COVID outbreak. Incidentally, in the past few days the number of positive cases has risen rapidly from "less than five" to "more than a hundred". At the same time, related hospitalizations are nil, so it all seems fairly contained to me. I say this in my own right because you don't hear from the government at all. The biweekly radio broadcast or a periodic townhall meeting: they are relics of a past behind us....

In this context there is also a discussion about a dialysis facility (in a personal and material sense) on the island. Sounds reach me that this would indeed be cost-effective, but somehow that sound does not reach The Hague unchanged so the idea of the contrary persists.

It seems to me that I am not saying much new because more than once there has been a rapporteur on the island who, during his or her sunny vacation, will undoubtedly have issued a report that seems not to have been acted upon at all in the European Netherlands.

I myself have already raised the issue of the incorrect situation regarding health insurance for students who will be studying in the European Netherlands from the Caribbean Netherlands. Silently this incorrect information has been removed on the website of the RCN (wrong information based on the help of an insurance company on behalf of expats).

RESPECT FOR CULTURE AND THE HISTORY OF SLAVERY

A team of scientists has investigated the course of events surrounding the excavations near the airport after criticism arose from the population about the 'secretive' course of events. The report was damning in terms of the conduct of the local government. Contracts were set up in such a way that if things went wrong, it was always possible to point the finger at someone else, and communication or involvement of the local population was virtually nil (while international agreements in the field of archaeology had leading rules of conduct). The recommendation to achieve a respectful reburial of the exhumed bodies soon is not progressing too much as yet. Evil tongues even claim that the bodies are no longer on the island. And the local government is silent...

INVESTMENTS ALWAYS COME FIRST...

The fact that the Island Council is hardly ever involved in developments on the island is something I cannot get used to, but it is more the rule than the exception. Investors (at least the men with the big money) just "do" and ignore permits, rules of conduct in connection with COVID and regulations of

Stenapa and Rijkswaterstaat concerning the protection of nature. All this is covered up by the authorities and it all looks un-Dutch (but then again, who is watching).

"BAKED AIR" (by KADUSHI and ZEMBLA)

On your agenda is the item "Baked Air" by Kadushi which deals with Bonaire. The ease with which the Dutch government ignores climate-friendly and green options and gives priority to investors who still earn their (dirty) money in the fossil fuel field is mercilessly exposed in the Zembla documentary.

The circumstances outlined in the Zembla documentary are of Bonaire and in a literal sense have no equivalent on St. Eustatius. However, where both islands have similar experiences is that through the actions of the European Netherlands only a handful of elite benefit from the developments and the ordinary "islander" does not benefit from anything at all and does not benefit in any way from living on these otherwise paradisiacal islands. One example concerns the installation of a large solar park for the generation of energy on Statia, financed by the European Netherlands. This should lead to a reduction in monthly energy costs for the residents. But nothing is further from the truth; the equity capital of Stuco is being depleted and the residents are left behind (Stuco's annual reports are impossible to find, even for members of the Island Council). Residents still pay a lot for the energy they use. This would be because the rate is linked to the price of oil in the world. What a nonsense: this is energy obtained from the sun!

Why are energy tariffs not decreasing based on these developments: a misunderstood riddle (unless you thus believe that in the background fossil forces are actually pulling the strings). And then Bonaire is still blessed with a visionary, communicative and a government that stands up for the residents....

In conclusion, I wish you (and therefore us) a successful debate.

Kind regards,

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*Cc: Chairman and members of the KOREL Committee of the Senate
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