

St. Eustatius, March 26, 2022.

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

In the past BES debate, beautiful words like equality, open and transparent, reciprocity and getting things done were heard. In short, a positive tone seemed to be set. But every time it has to become a bit more concrete, much of it seems to be similar to what has been passed. Perhaps "old wine in new bottles" sounds a tad too critical but I am looking for concrete steps that are being taken, and then it looks a lot like the Knops era, which I certainly do not want to go back to. Great drive but consultation or respect: none of that! And at the end of the day very little has happened.

The discussion about the social minimum is gradually taking on the characteristics of a farce, or a ritual dance around the hot topic. Each time it comes to the spawn, we must first wait for the result of one or the other investigation. Take Mr. Ceder's question. When he thinks that the costs of daily living (groceries ("peanut butter"), energy, internet etc.) are significantly higher than in the European Netherlands, so that it should be possible that the social minimum in the Dutch Caribbean can even be higher than that in the European Netherlands, there is no concrete "yes" or "no". Instead we fiddle on with doing research and so-called small steps. But in practice it remains all talk at a high level of abstraction because in fact no steps are being taken. So the fact that Rutte III was not able to make a dent in the proverbial packet of butter now seems to become standard policy in Rutte IV: talk, do nothing, and certainly no promises that will benefit the Dutch Caribbean.

My suggestion that the whole discussion about this Caribbean social minimum could be un(ground)legitimate, seems to be ignored by everyone. *Am I so wrong?* My reasoning seems to me to be quite straightforward. However, no one takes up this suggestion or presses for a further interpretation by the Council of State when it comes to Article 132a of the Constitution (especially paragraph 4).

The adage "*comply or explain*" also frequently heard in the recent debate seems to me to apply here. Of course, "own" (island) laws and regulations can be made if the essentially different circumstances give reason to do so, but now it is sometimes said very easily that Dutch legislation cannot be applied one-on-one because things are simply different in the Caribbean Netherlands. But then, in my opinion, we reverse cause and effect.

Real arguments to do things differently should in my opinion also be named, such as the tropical climate, the English language and the hurricane sensitivity. Of course, while there seems to be

movement on the BSN issue, objectively speaking there is no argument that justifies different registration of Basic Personal Data. So in my opinion, the observed movement in said file is one that follows a "hibernation" of almost twelve years (after 10-10-10). The bottom line in this discussion, in my opinion, is such that time and again, arguments are too easily sought for - in general - not having to do anything (at least nothing that the Caribbean Dutchman notices a positive effect of). Better postal delivery and the application of postal codes is just such a thing. All very clear, no misunderstanding about that, but nothing actually happens and the mail from the European Netherlands still takes weeks or months to reach our island. *Oh yes, perhaps a new investigation is being considered...*

Around the anticipated time that with some fanfare in 2023 attention will be paid to the abolition of slavery, there is the discussion about the exhumations near the airport of bodies of Statians from the slavery era. The group of international scientists has clearly stated that the Statian government has acted reprehensibly here. For the Secretary of State to then remark in the debate that *bodies were discovered during construction work* is a gross and disrespectful distortion of the facts. How she could have uttered these words I do not know, but I do not rule out the possibility that a statement such as this could have come from the mind of the government commissioner. There are currently no construction activities at that location; instead, very secretly, at least the Island Council has not been informed (in advance), about two years ago an archaeological investigation took place (with a final report in November 2020) that was only slightly publicized in mid 2021. In June 2021 another shameful townhall meeting took place in which responsibilities were shifted in a very shadowy way (between the Island Government/Regulation Commissioner on the one hand and SECAR on the other hand); A "game" which political The Hague can still suck a point out of and which has been denounced by the aforementioned group of scientists.

For example, this week a 'tender' was issued, aimed at the infrastructural completion of the area around the airport (parking lot, access and exit roads, etc.) whereby the slave cemetery may or may not be at issue (no word on this), but one thing is being tackled with some vigor and the other (i.c. the respectful reburial with memorial) can wait for months (or longer: something with delay and postponement ...). Or - worse - that later on the reburial cannot take place because it would interfere with the already started construction works. Or - even worse - that the remaining parts of the (former slave) cemetery would be removed without mercy (and without further consultation). A kind of "disrespectful squared".

It is not my intention to accuse the Secretary of State of telling things that are not entirely true, but I do want to make it clear that the entourage of the Secretary of State (both The Hague and Statian officials/administrators) have their own agenda that is not necessarily aimed at improving the welfare

and prosperity of the Statian people and a respectful relationship between the Netherlands and St. Eustatius. Rather, streets seem to be swept clean with references to the other who would be responsible for the proverbial pollution.

The situation that democracy has not yet been returned to the Statians is emphatically looked away from, so that Dutch investors (here I am referring particularly to Mr. Barnhoorn and his Golden Rock resort project) can go ahead and work without a permit on - for example - the coastline near his resort. With the current balance of power it is easy, without too much opposition from, for example, the Island Council, to irreversibly implement the investments after which the 'point of no return' will appear to be behind us when at all critical points are made at these investments and activities.

Nothing seems to be learned from projects like 'Chogogo' on Bonaire in terms of prevention and enforcement. In any case, a business case or project plan otherwise of the investments on St. Eustatius - I do not know of such documents - will not lead to an improvement of the life of the Statian but will be mainly aimed at the own pockets of the investor(s). The situation that Zembla made visible rather mercilessly on Bonaire is also taking place here, as yet invisible to public observation. It's my intention to wait and see what political The Hague does with this signal before informing investigative journalism clubs like Zembla about this as well. Mr. Barnhoorn is an old friend of Zembla by the way: his reputation as a rose grower in Africa who diverted much-needed water for people and animals in favor of the growth of flowers was exposed earlier by this club. If such a report were to come out, I expect that Mr. Barnhoorn would not want to cooperate. After all, he did not do so with the report on the African adventure either.

For the record, these are mainly and only the points that struck me as underexposed or misrepresented. Other matters such as healthcare on the island, the public transport function that the airplane simply has in this island environment, banking matters and notarial matters (*the latter, by the way, are well regulated by law but practice is different...*), are known to you and have been explained to you by me earlier.

Well, I hope to be in time for your preparation for the two-minute debate next Tuesday. As always, I wish you much wisdom and decisiveness.

Kind regards,

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