

St. Eustatius, April 21, 2022.

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

On the one hand I feel like an onlooker, on the other hand like an insider because you - as a member of the Lower House, representative of the people, so also of us, Statians - are much further removed from the daily practice on the island. And then there is no press on the island that, as in the European Netherlands, informs and interprets. Admittedly, the one newspaper has a little more of the same color, the other a little more of the same color, but in any case there is one newspaper that informs us - residents of the Netherlands - every day about the most important developments and abuses. It is along these lines that the government's policy is regularly scrutinized. After all, many a parliamentary question begins with the sub-question as to whether the Minister is aware that medium X has recently published piece Y. This is all a bit obligatory, since the answer to this sub-question is always "yes", but I would be a fool to make a point of it. In any case, there is feedback from Dutch society to which the national administration then reflects. This dynamic usually does not concern the parts that belong to the Dutch Caribbean. It is for this reason that I am motivated to regularly let at least some report - however subjective - from this southwestern corner of the Netherlands resound in The Hague.

I see that the death of Mr. Pinas has stirred up a lot of unrest among the people of Statia. The message was - also carried out in a silent (protest) march - that the shovel must be put in the care organization in the broad sense. And what is happening? It may be too early to judge but it is my expectation that not very much is happening. Why? Because, in general, there is not much complaining. Yes, on the occasion of such a protest march, and also on Facebook, but complaints that the care organization can do something with: there will not be that many. First, because many Statians are unable to clearly formulate their complaints or findings, but also, and more seriously, complaints easily lead to repercussions. By way of example (although not entirely by accident), it may well happen that a doctor refuses to help a patient with something relatively harmless such as a speck of dirt in the eye or a (metal) splinter in a finger, because that same patient complained earlier in time about this doctor's treatment of a family member of that patient. This naturally results in our doctors (not BIG-registered!) imagining themselves as a God in France and "ruling over the community of patients" with a certain degree of arbitrariness. In such a society (where, moreover, everyone knows each other and little seems to remain secret or confidential) people will think twice before complaining. And so the formal register of complaints will probably be fairly empty, behind which a less than optimal functioning healthcare organization can and will hide.

What I'm afraid of now is that there will be no real sweeping through - for example - the care organization, but that it will remain a matter of a change of function here and there, supplemented by a small bunch of good intentions for the future. After which everything conveniently "stays as it was" while those responsible can wash their hands of it: after all, "something" happened? And there were actually not that many complaints....

As with so many things, it starts with a healthy dose of good will. If parties on both sides of the ocean really want to get something off the ground, it generally works: the proverbial noses are pointed in the same direction and together they agree on a path forward to effect the improvements. But if one of the parties does not really want to, then absolutely nothing happens. And I believe I am seeing more and more of this kind of stalemate.

Parties in The Hague who believe that legislation simply has to be followed and that changing legislation requires an extremely laborious and lengthy (in Hague jargon: careful) process. Only, of course, when you really have to change something in the view of the Hague administrator. After all, the intervention of February 2018 was prepared with un-Hague speed and poured into legislation: the then State Secretary wanted to show decisiveness. Well, if you really want to, then it can be done.... Is it going a lot better now? No, of course not, because parties on both sides of the ocean fought each other instead of (wanting to) cooperate. The government commissioner is a puppet of the government in The Hague, the communication with the Island Council is difficult to difficult and now mediation is the key word in finding a solution. At a deeper level, of course, lies the unwillingness of the Dutch government (expressed in the actions of the government commissioner) to make something beautiful out of it. Anyway, there is now a mediation process going on so there is again every reason for The Hague to do nothing and just "wait and see".

I expect that the same will happen with the care organization. I mentioned earlier the broom that should be wiped out of this mess (I've spoken before of an Augias stable). An obvious approach for me would be to copy the Dutch healthcare organization as much as possible in terms of "comply or explain". In that model Dutch healthcare insurers could also be effective on the Dutch Caribbean market and if in the European Netherlands only BIG registered doctors may work, why not also in the Dutch Caribbean? A club like the ZVK can in my opinion best just "evaporate". By the way, what should we do with St. Maarten and Colombia as a fallback for St. Eustatius (and Saba)? Why not just Bonaire (where in that case extra investments may be needed) or to the European Netherlands; moreover, in all these areas the same Dutch legislation applies.

Note: A similar observation applies to the services of notaries on the island of St. Eustatius. People are complaining all the time that St. Maarten would no longer want to participate in these services. But the legislation is already in place to bring Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba together in a notarial sense. Where is the enforcement in this? The former government commissioner Van Rij also clung frenetically to Sint Maarten. What forces give Sint Maarten such a position? Also in connectivity I see on the Hague side a seemingly endless amount of reluctance because Winair and Sint Maarten must and will be part of a solution to the connectivity problem while a club like EZ Air is ready to jump into the hole as soon as that hole is made. But no, even the department responsible for connectivity chooses not to listen to the Dutch Caribbean needs and to push its own way through. She then hides behind a report, but is the commissioner of that report not that same ministry (of Infrastructure and Water Management)? So here, too, I think I detect a "packaging of unwillingness".

Of course I want to understand that the COHO-problems of the CAS-countries are "infinitely" more complicated, and although I do have an opinion about it, in this letter I will mainly limit myself to the BES-domain (whereby I will mainly focus on what I experience on the E of BES: St. Eustatius).

Of course, there are also a lot of comments to be made, such as the somewhat conservative and reserved attitude of the St. Eustatius Island Council members when it comes to the involvement of the European Netherlands (in any area whatsoever), but is this not partly motivated by the fact that in practice, the findings of the St. Eustatius do not matter at all when Caribbean policy is formulated? For example, what does a traffic circle do in St. Eustatius's road network? It is nothing more than a kind of status symbol without any added value for the island. But yes, the Dutch...

Of course I'm always willing to act as a discussion partner for any Dutch government club, but to date I've noticed little more than that my words are taken for granted.

Note: Discussion partner? I can already see you thinking.... Not a member of the Island Council and actually an unorganized resident of St. Eustatius at all, that obviously cannot be a serious interlocutor. So be it. Coloring outside the lines has never been a strongly developed quality of The Hague. I am waiting and watching the developments (if they come at all...).

As always, I wish you much wisdom, but also initiative as "motherland" to offer a listening ear to the Caribbean Netherlands in general and St. Eustatius in particular.

Oh yes, just this: no one is talking about the disrespectful exhumations anymore. Any plans for reburial of the excavated human remains? If anyone knows anything about it, they may say so. The government commissioner is silent as the grave about it....

Best regards,

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Cc: *Chairman and members of the I&W and VWS Committees
National Ombudsman
Kingdom Relations Committee of the Dutch Senate (KOREL)*