

St. Eustatius, May 8, 2022.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee(s) on Kingdom Relations of the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament,

As in the advertising and marketing world, the power of repetition applies - as far as I am concerned. The message below is not really new, but it does fit a pattern in which the discussion of Caribbean Dutch developments is held up time and again, or falls into a trap, or needs to be studied first. And for that reason I pick up my pen again!

I have already drawn attention to intra-island connectivity many times. And I am not alone: the Island Council of St. Eustatius does so regularly as well. Until now, however, The Hague remains deaf and blind to these signals. In all this rigidity an alternative to the existing connectivity (as seen from St. Eustatius) in which Winair does not appear and also not the ferry, is unmentionable. The frequency of flying is decreasing, the ticket price is increasing, alternatives are conceivable but The Hague keeps thinking about maintaining Winair and the alternative over water.

Previous studies - I am thinking for example of the SEO document from July 2018 ¹- indicate that alternatives by water are not a 'real' alternative. When I arrived here eight years ago, there were several (I think even: five) flights per day (!) between St. Eustatius and St. Maarten. The ticket price then was around 200 US dollars for a return trip. At the moment there are 'stunts' with tickets from 325 US dollars while in the summer the number of flights is 'jacked up' to two a day. From August 2022, Winair will then go back to the low-season routine, which at best therefore implies one flight a day and not even every day.

Somehow it does not want to properly penetrate the consciousness of our ministers, state secretaries and parliamentarians that

- the fare is outrageously high for this public transport service (while of all the problems facing St. Eustatius, the poverty problem is the most prominent);
- Winair only has two priorities: Winair and Sint Maarten (flying to Sint Eustatius is, in the view of these two parties, a cost that must be avoided as much as possible);

¹ See <https://www.jhtm.nl/stationews/bibliotheek/connectiviteit-caribische-deel-van-het-koninkrijk.pdf>

- both Winair and Sint Maarten want money to be "made" on this transport service and the best guarantee to achieve this goal is to maintain a monopoly position and to set the fare as high as possible.

In this context - and also not for first mentioned - I further note that anyway the dependency on Sint Maarten is an expensive one. In 2017, when Sint Maarten was severely affected by hurricane Irma, this dependency was also the cause of all sorts of things not going well or being delayed. That lesson seems to have been forgotten by now...

With airlines like EZ Air, in combination with SXM Airways, an excellent alternative is conceivable in which the direct and reasonably priced connection between Saba, St. Eustatius and Bonaire is realizable, but then the precondition of Winair and St. Maarten as part of the solution must be abandoned.

It seems to me that, as with so many problems that require a solution, proper consultation with those directly involved (all of whom really *want* to go for a desirable, workable and affordable solution, without 'hidden agendas') is the most probate medicine. It only becomes difficult when not all parties *want* to reach a solution. It is not for nothing that the saying goes: "it's bad to eat cherries with high lords". Parties who at all costs want to hold on to Winair and St. Maarten, as well as holding on against their better judgement to alternatives over water instead of through the air, should think twice, among others regarding the ownership of Winair: the country of the Netherlands is owner for about eight percent (the remaining part of the shares lies with the country of St. Maarten); it may very well be that that ownership implies an undesirable conflict of interests.

After all, does the loyalty of the Dutch government now lie with the residents of the Caribbean Netherlands or with the Sint Maarten company Winair? The uncomfortable truth here is of course that 'The Hague' prefers to keep its Caribbean residents on the prison island 'Sint Alcatraz' (after all, the vast majority of the residents of Sint Eustatius cannot in good conscience afford a plane ticket to Sint Maarten...) thus *de facto* shaping the colonization of Sint Eustatius and its residents.

Note: For the record I note that the link with the colonial era is not necessarily made by me but for the anti-Dutch sentiment this is of course grist to the mill.

The uncomfortable thing for the government is that in several policy areas the skewed and unfavorable outcome for the Dutch Caribbean is now manifesting itself. Dead people are falling because the healthcare organization on St. Eustatius is as rotten as a log, the poverty is deliberately

maintained by the Dutch government because we continue the (actually unacceptable) discussion about the subsistence minimum in the Dutch Caribbean, it is difficult for students at school, and even then often with a delay, to find a connection with the next level of education elsewhere in the Kingdom because the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science considers the developments and decision making in the CXC domain as something that is far from their own bed, and I could probably go on like this for a while with issues that you know just as well, or maybe even better, than I do. I say 'maybe even better' because you are in any case more widely (not always more accurately) informed than we are here on the island. And this too is done deliberately (think of the mushroom routine: "keep them in the dark and feed them with shit").

On paper, the solution to all of this is obvious: equate the laws and regulations in the Caribbean Netherlands with the European Netherlands and only accept exceptions in cases where the circumstances are substantially different from those in the European Netherlands, because that is how it is regulated for public entities. All of this of course in conjunction with honest information about these developments because it is too easy for the Dutch to 'quickly come up with solutions' which are then 'implemented without much consultation'.

Note: The reader will recognize here my earlier remark about the stirring up of anti-Dutch sentiments, by the very Dutchman(s) themselves...

Well, it seems to me that enough is enough for now. After the IPKO I think there's a lot on your plate again. I hope that the 'small' problems of the BES islands are not dwarfed by the Big Problems of the CAS countries.

Kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman*
Chairman and members of the Infrastructure and Water Management Committee