

St. Eustatius, June 27, 2022.

Dear chairmen and members of the Committees on Kingdom Relations (of the Lower and Upper Houses),

That people do not always agree with each other is a given for me. In fact, it is my conviction that where different opinions confront each other, both parties can emerge from the discussion stronger. This requires not only the ability to think (in order to form an opinion in the first place), but also the sincere willingness to listen to the other. The better leaders organize contradiction. I seem to remember reading once that a man like President Lincoln was known for his willingness to listen to all sorts of opinions (including those of his enemies), in order to distil the best from them with a basis of support. Anyway, I am possibly describing an ideal situation here, which is not always easy to realize. And so it happens that also in the Lower House the debate sometimes degenerates with angry words and one-liners that may well 'hit the spot', but are not always of any level.

I find it even worse when in a society - here the size of a small village - developments are covered up, so that dissent cannot even arise. In the small circle around the government commissioner there are - I would almost say by definition - no dissenters but only co-talkers. If I describe the Statian society, perhaps a bit too caricatured, there is the Commissioner of the Government with a small "inner circle" that talks to her and "spindoctors", there is the Island Council and the rest of the population. The model would not be out of place in an autocracy. It is my belief that the recently completed mediation process between the Government Commissioner and the Island Council was not 'really' concluded in harmony. The time allotted for it simply ran out, and with that end result the world must make do.

Never, at least almost never, is there a townhall meeting. But then the State Secretary for Kingdom Relations and the Minister for Housing arrive on the island, so, well, as a government commissioner you can't avoid something like a town hall meeting. Somewhat forcibly, a briefing takes place based on well-chosen topics, which in principle nobody can afford to miss. Then a press release - dated the day of the town hall meeting - reveals that reports on the risks regarding the cliff as a result of erosion have been kept from the Island Council and the population and the government commissioner refuses to go into it in more detail, using as a 'shield' a legal procedure that has been or will be instituted and which is currently ongoing. I am not concerned with that procedure, but the simple fact that warning reports have been kept out of public view for years seems to me to be a bad thing!

And then I see recently - source: LinkedIn - that the government commissioner is in European Netherlands and has an apparently very pleasant conversation with the Deputy Secretary-General of the Ministry of Health. Something with a plan of ten points and good developments. According to me, the content of any development in this area is unknown on the island and - I think - also not to the Island Council. No press release, nothing. Recently - in April - two deaths occurred after which a lot of commotion arose because the population suspected a connection with the abominable care organization. A silent march was held and the only thing that happened is that a change manager was

hired and now hip films appear with the introduction of a NL doctor. The care function is therefore not really improved, only the packaging looks a bit newer. State Secretary Van Ooijen visited us on Monday, June 20. He will have spoken to the necessary *selected* 'stakeholders' (what a rotten word: the island counts about 3000 inhabitants, aren't we all stakeholders?). Be that as it may, the Secretary of State may have a good memory of it. Whether the population will notice anything about this in the longer term is no longer a question but a near-certainty ("no") for me. To the best of my belief and based on what I see on the island, only two things count for the government commissioner: 1) how not to get worse myself and 2) not too much fuzz on the island (which negatively affects the status quo).

This weekend Mr. Thom de Graaf appears on the island, the vice president of the Council of State, the highest advisory body in The Netherlands. I hear it in passing. It appears that people who speak with him are hand-picked, without giving it much publicity. And suddenly it turns out that he had to leave as early as Sunday because the plane was leaving early. This strikes me as extraordinarily clumsy. The problems on the island are quite complicated and allotting a very limited amount of time to each person does not do justice to the seriousness and depth of the problems experienced, as if from higher up (on the island) there are forces at work only to keep up the pretence of transparency. I am convinced that on the part of Mr. Thom de Graaf this was also experienced as (too) restrictive. It gives the impression here that it especially did not want to bring him into contact with "people on the island." *I'm sure it's all too bad thoughts of me, but if it were you who were in my position, kept ignorant of what is going on, wouldn't you have the same thoughts?*

What comes after some time here I do not know exactly, but as things stand it is not democracy returning to the island in any case. It looks much more like an autocracy. The fact that I am writing it down will not be appreciated by the government commissioner. But it is the unabashed expression of my sincere expectation!

We would already make a step forward in terms of democracy when the truth circulates transparently on the island because the government commissioner periodically - think about twice a month - organizes a townhall meeting in which it is clearly put on the agenda in advance what the population will be consulted about, in addition to what has recently been decided. Now if only this could get off the ground....

Kind regards,

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Cc: National Ombudsman