

The Hague, September 3, 2022.

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

More than once I have been amazed (and also critical) that in various areas the difference between the Caribbean Dutchman and the European Dutchman remains so "obvious". For that reason, I am extremely happy that GroenLinks has now put its question marks against the "enormous social inequality". The continuing festering discussion about the fictitious benchmark for a social minimum has led to nothing at all for twelve years and still, far into the future, something is perhaps expected of it. It's all hot air and it's not about anything at all. Basically, of course, the Caribbean Dutch are simply "Dutchmen" for whom a social minimum has been established and to which all kinds of benefits are then linked. This is how we do it in the Netherlands, and in the Caribbean Netherlands no different than in the European Netherlands. As soon as there is any deviation from this, we find ourselves on a slippery slope where at some point it is simply called "discrimination".

Recently I read in the Volkskrant that the number of Dutch people on social security benefits has not been this low in nine years: at the end of June there were 401 thousand people on social security, over 22 thousand less than a year earlier. Let this observation sink in: in one year, 22 thousand fewer people on social security than in the previous year! Twenty-two thousand people: that is almost the total number of people in the Dutch Caribbean. So in Dutch statistics, this "reduction of about five percent fewer welfare recipients" is a "wrinkle" in the statistics. While that same wrinkle is the size of almost all the inhabitants in the Dutch Caribbean. In other words, the money is not the problem when you would like to make the social infrastructure equal in the Netherlands on both sides of the Atlantic. This whole discussion about the fictitious benchmark of the social minimum in the Dutch Caribbean is a big bland discussion that masks unwillingness of the government to bring Caribbean Dutch people to full Dutch citizenship. I hope that partly due to the questions submitted by GroenLinks, the new position will soon be that in many respects, but thus also in social respect, we will henceforth speak of only one level of Dutchmen.

For the time being, things are not going very well with the BSN: the National Ombudsman has already made a point of it, with a view to the new academic year. In his criticism, he also mentions the health insurance that applies to students. I have made arguments about this before: the simplest solution by far is to simply connect to what is already in place. The Caribbean Dutch student can best make use of a European Dutch health insurance which, in combination with the care allowance, provides excellent coverage without many costs. All that organizational overhead to arrange things from the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland will only lead to nothing (and, as was shown in the past: even to inconvenience for the Dutch Caribbean student).

Thinking of students from the Dutch Caribbean who want to continue their studies in the European Netherlands, I have already remarked before that the diploma register that has existed for several years in the European Netherlands, for Dutch Caribbean students is, for the time being, a nice facility for only European Dutchmen. So far, there are some nice words and intentions but no actual initiatives to eliminate the inequality between Caribbean and European Dutch citizens.

Finally, to stay in this domain for a moment, I take note of the intention of DUO to prevent the delivery or renewal of the passport in case the student is unwilling to pay off his or her study debt and moreover turns out to be untraceable. I read this message especially in connection with students coming from the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. Although I understand DUO's impotence (and its desire to repay borrowed money), it seems to me that this measure can only be acceptable if it applies to all students and not just to those from the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.

In order not to have to come up with a whole list of points again and again, I will stop there for the time being. I am looking forward to a positive response to the questions of GreenLeft, so that another step can be taken in the equal treatment of Caribbean and European Dutch citizens.

Afterword: Often I "sense" a reluctance (on the cabinet side) to proceed with the equalization of both Dutch domains. Three arguments that I suspect in this regard (because they have never been mentioned, let alone substantiated with a calculation or otherwise) are as follows:

- *It costs too much.* A silly argument; after all, it can't be that a sizeable village of about 25,000 inhabitants simply takes a toll on the Dutch budget (which is almost 700 times larger than the population).
- *It cannot be done without additional or corrective legislation.* This argument is not heard very often, but it may well be true. A municipality is not the same as a public body (not even a 'special Dutch municipality'). On the other hand, with the right mindset it is often possible to find a way around this. Either by including special clauses in existing legislation or by eliminating existing (BES-related) legislation and substituting the European Dutch equivalent. A delaying research with questions to the known way, or a visit to one or more of the islands, is therefore mostly unnecessary. Take, for example, the report *Het Koninkrijk tegen het licht*¹, delivered in April 2019. A nice report with comparisons between the Kingdom of the Netherlands, France, Denmark and the United Kingdom, but it seems to me that this report has been added to the proverbial bottom drawer of the desk.
- *A pull might be the result of better (social) services compared to the surrounding area.* Although I can imagine something with this argument, there are two notions that apply to it. First, this is often an aspect that can be solved separately (for example, by setting up security at the border, the port or the airport specifically for this purpose). Secondly, the attraction applies in two directions: on the one hand, there is the Caribbean resident of an island elsewhere in the region who (for that reason) feels attracted to one of the BES islands; on the other hand, there is the Bonairean, Statian or Saban who (for the same reason) feels 'drawn' to the European Netherlands!

With kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman, Chair and members of the KOREL Committee of the Senate*

¹ https://www.jhtm.nl/statianews/bibliotheek/rapport_het_koninkrijk_tegen_het_licht.pdf