

The Hague, September 12, 2022.

Dear Chairman and members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations (TK and EK),

To get straight to the point, I present to you the following case study. Suppose, per the next opportunity (let's say: next month or from January 2023, or something like that) we do it as follows. The inhabitants of the province of Drenthe are no longer entitled to unemployment benefits where they were until now, and the inhabitants of the province of Limburg who are on welfare will receive only half of their benefits. It is, of course, only a thought experiment, but still. You would probably think of me that I have gone beyond reality and am just babbling nonsense.

Nevertheless, this course of action is similar to what our government is doing with the Dutch Caribbean. For your understanding I will dwell on the concepts of CAS and BES. CAS stands for the countries of Curaçao, Aruba and St. Maarten. These countries have a far-reaching duty of care for their own residents. Only Defense, Foreign Affairs and the issuance of Dutch passports are areas where these CAS countries are not responsible but where the (European) Dutch government has primacy. But for the policy fields of Education and Social Affairs, for example, the governments of these countries have their own responsibility. If more money is spent than is brought in, then it is primarily their own (national) responsibility to cut their coat according to their cloth. The European Netherlands, or rather: the Kingdom of the Netherlands (with a Kingdom government) sees to it that this "playing with own responsibility" does not get out of hand. A "game" in which boundaries are sometimes touched or even crossed.

It is different with the BES islands (Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba). These islands have the status of a "public body", just as the Noordoostpolder and Rijnmond were "organized" at the time. The public body is a construct that is defined in the Constitution and, based on national (Dutch) legislation, additional rules can be set for public bodies. *There is a slight problem here, because when do circumstances on the islands, which are sometimes essentially different from those in the European Netherlands, give rise to their own laws and regulations?*

It is my firm belief that great restraint should be exercised in determining that certain circumstances are 'different'. I am also convinced that the Dutch government currently easily embraces the 'other' circumstances in order to introduce its own independent (but especially lower quality) legislation for the BES islands. *However, and this is not at all the case in the European Netherlands, the Bonairean, the Statian and the Saban are just as much Dutch as the inhabitant of Drenthe or Limburg.*

And so my case from the first paragraph is not so much out of the blue after all: the social safety net on the last three islands mentioned (*so for the record: not the CAS countries, but the BES islands*) is of a different (lesser) order than in the European Netherlands. I have touched on this point more often in my letters, but when I walk around in the European Netherlands and read the newspaper, all kinds of things come to mind, but the fact that there are also Caribbean Dutchmen who are just as much

Dutchmen as the European Dutchmen seems to be completely unknown here. I think that almost no inhabitant of the European Netherlands (and with that I am also referring to you, our parliamentarians, so also those of the Caribbean Dutch) is aware of the fact that our government does little else than *institutionally discriminate* against the Bonairean, Statian and Sabian.

And so the poverty on these three islands is easily 'reasoned away' by the European Netherlands (sometimes referring to an almost *criminal* discussion around a *fictitious* subsistence minimum that is supposed to be a *benchmark* for the *distant future*). And so you can wipe your own European Dutch street clean with a completely *misplaced* sense of justice.

I would like to make one remark in this regard and that concerns the legislation. I do not exclude - but simply do not know exactly - that precisely the legislation that gives content to the functioning of the three public entities Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (such as WOLBES and FINBES) "stand in the way" of the full equality of these "municipalities" with municipalities in the European Netherlands. But if that is so, it is a matter of eliminating precisely those obstacles. Moreover, when this is the case, the government should be clear and transparent about this and not send a new set of officials and/or researchers to the islands to "further study" an already known "problem".

I would like to mention some more substantive points in this letter, but on second thought I will save them for a later letter. The realization that the Caribbean Dutchman and the European Dutchman together populate the (Caribbean and European) Netherlands and would actually like to derive the same rights from this status, seems to me too important a notion not to dwell on.

Hence this letter. An important notion that could, or even should, lead to consequences within each of the policy areas.

I wish you much wisdom to allow this notion to have an effect on you in your ongoing political actions.

Kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman*