

The Hague, January 8, 2023.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations of the TK and EK,

Let me start by saying that the three islands of Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius are *separate* public entities. This means that when one of these three needs to define legislation that the other two do not agree with, then in my opinion, that one island can simply go its way and the other two do not follow. Recently something like this played out on Saba (in the context of soft drug policy) and that could not go through because the other two BES islands thought differently about it. This is of course nonsense, stemming from unwillingness, laziness or misplaced paternalism on the part of departments in The Hague.

In previous letters of mine, I usually focused on an issue that was current at the time and which, in my opinion, needed to be addressed urgently. Now, strictly speaking, I am not a party to this process but the issue of first- and second-class citizens in the same country of the Netherlands is one that I hold dear. After all, institutional discrimination is lurking and that is the last thing you want.

Apologies for the slavery period have been made and were generally well received. Much depends on how it is followed up, and it is too early to judge. But in the form of "thinking ahead," I will give you my initial thoughts in which, while recognizing that the BES are in fact three islands, I expressly address the public body of St. Eustatius.

On the basis of mutual equality and mutual respect I propose that, in consultation between the Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations in The Hague and the Public Entity of St. Eustatius, an inventory be made of which aspects must be provided with specific, island legislation and regulations and what, on the contrary, can suffice with the existing legislation and regulations in force in the Netherlands. All this based on mutually agreed upon points in which the circumstances on St. Eustatius are essentially different from those in the European Netherlands.

Note: Here I note that on behalf of St. Eustatius the Island Council should be the representative body; the government representative was nominated/appointed by MinBZK and it has since become apparent that she does not speak on behalf of the population.

It is a flaw that *somewhere in the country of the Netherlands* NOT the Dutch legal infrastructure is used but that of the no longer existing country 'Netherlands Antilles'. Of course, this should have simply been the Dutch one. Combined with the status of public body, this makes things considerably clearer. It is then simply *comply or explain*.

Furthermore, it is a flaw that *somewhere in the country of the Netherlands* NOT the Euro but the US Dollar has been chosen as the currency. Apart from Puerto Rico, the United States is the closest area where this currency also applies. With the choice of the Euro, virtually all financial irregularities could be straightened out in one fell swoop and Dutch banks can also provide their services to the Caribbean public entities. And what do we care: the US Dollar and the Euro currently differ almost nothing in value.

After these introductory paragraphs, I propose that the parliament insist on a periodically updated list of differences to be maintained by the cabinet (with BZK as coordinating department) as an agenda or plan of action.

I would like to give a first impetus for such a list whereby I note - unnecessarily - that such a list can only be effectuated after the ideas of the Island Council of St. Eustatius have also been incorporated and this Island Council has also agreed to it.

Of course, there are the well-known, eye-catching issues (which, however, are still nagging) with which a lot of 'old sores' can immediately be removed. After all, if the two aforementioned woeful errors are eliminated, a number of previously mentioned points come easily within reach: the BSN, financial services (with NL banks), the social minimum with related benefits and income tax.

Also on this list, of course, intra-island travel *furnished as public transportation*, should not be missing. And with regard to health care, it seems to me there is a lot to improve whereby the ZVK/ZJCN simply merges into the compulsory health insurance as is the case in the European part of the NL. On Bonaire - for the BES region - the hospital will be set up and Sint Maarten serves as the base for acute specialist care. Goodbye to 'Colombia' as a care station can then be said.

So much for my introduction. I gladly give - through the intervention of Parliament and Cabinet - the opportunity to the Island Council of St. Eustatius to modify and/or supplement this proposal.

Kind regards,

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cc: National Ombudsman