

Subject: *Public administration on St. Eustatius, Caribbean Netherlands*

The Hague, April 25, 2023.

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

When the intervention on St. Eustatius took place (in February 2018, more than five years ago) I initially also thought: this is good, now we are going to see how governance should really be done. This letter will not provide a historical overview, but I have to get it off my chest: since then, my trust in politics has also been seriously affected.

What are (European) Dutch officials and administrators in general arrogant, cheeky and pedantic. There is no consultation at any level, at least not on the basis of equality. What at the time "The Hague" reproached the administration of St. Eustatius for (i.c. friends, family, favours) is being executed in the opposite direction in magnified form.

The government commissioner surrounds herself with faithful and in this small informal company the sheets are handed out. In the infrastructural sense as well: the contractor who knows himself to be the "winner" of the tenders each time regarding airport, roads, etc. is closely related to this company and in terms of related companies is the club that has previously been involved in a bribery affair. How reliable and incorruptible do you want your image to be....

Thé major infrastructure, economic and tourism investment on the island is the Golden Rock Resort. The investor is famous for flower farms in Africa and - if the media is to be believed - channeling the water there in such a way that humans and animals had less water in favor of the flowers. In the segment of philanthropists, you also have - apparently - different classes. In Curaçao at the time, there was Jacob Gelt Dekker. Judging by the media, he was a true gentleman who invested in such a way that everyone benefited. He also thought about training the workers in his projects. The investor on St. Eustatius has only one real concern: his own wallet! He also did not and does not care about laws and regulations. For example, preparing the territory for construction involved extensive tree felling without any permit. Constructing a path from the resort to the ocean and building a deep pool near the resort's cliff edge was done without a permit. He also did not care about the compulsory wearing of mouth guards that was applicable at the time (and on his authority: the external - often from China - workers at the resort also did not wear mouth guards). All this without intervention by the local government. In other words: money seems to buy everything, including governance.

For every problem, according to good practice in the Rutte IV cabinet, a commission is appointed to investigate and come up with "agreeable" recommendations, which can therefore be moved forward in time so that a quick and to the point approach to the problem with "applicable preconditions" can be taken up at an appropriate (toned down) pace. Of course, I am now thinking of the social minimum for which the Caribbean Netherlands is suddenly assigned the status of second-class Netherlands. After all, why do other rules for income tax, social benefits, currency and various other matters apply in the Caribbean Netherlands than in other parts of the country of the Netherlands?

Justified exceptions - according to the Constitution - are based on circumstances that are *essentially* distinct from the European Netherlands. But not all differences can be traced to substantially distinctive circumstances. Sometimes they simply suit local and The Hague administrators (as far as I am concerned, this smacks of abuse of power).

There is a lawsuit pending about the EcoStatia/Orangebay Hotel and the Public Entity and/or European Netherlands must pay compensation in it. Also this case does not deserve any beauty prize as far as the transparent and complete provision of information (incl. detailed annexes) is concerned. Understood as: withholding reports that could show a risk if protective measures were not taken (which were then omitted).

Then there is finally - at least in this non-exhaustive enumeration - The Hague's position that if in the financial management a deficit is found, it should be borne by the Public Entity. A very uncool position given The Hague's emphatic interference in just about every aspect of governance, including putting financial management in order. After five years, that management is - apparently - still not in order. This responsibility cannot be abdicated, nor do I hope that a reason will be found in this to deny the Island Council the right to budget any longer.

Well, so far some of my notes on public administration. If you really want to get to the bottom of things, a frankly untrustworthy administration on both sides of the ocean does not really help you. Investigative journalists from - for example - "Follow the Money" are more appropriate. In any case, I will send a copy of this letter to this organization.

Let me conclude on a positive note and express the hope that the governments on this and the other side of the ocean really get around the table and untangle the omissions piece by piece and deal honestly with each other in the future. It would mark a turning point in the relationship.

Sincerely,

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cc: *National Ombudsman, Follow the Money*