

The Hague, June 11, 2023.

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

Just a moment for a periodic update on my part. And just a few observations. Although you can get bogged down in a question of definition (*what is poverty? what is a low income threshold? what is the benchmark for a social minimum? what are the real necessary costs of living?*) I see about 5 to 6 percent of the population in the European Netherlands below a defined income threshold (according to CBS). In the Caribbean Netherlands it is almost 30 percent and thus five or six times as much.

And then I am assuming the so-despised benchmark instead of the estimated 30 percent higher *necessary cost of living*. The Minister for Poverty Policy states that the Cabinet applies the "comply or explain" principle but at the same time does not consider the residents of the Caribbean Netherlands to be full-fledged Dutch citizens. This strikes me as a *discriminatory* course of action.

Why must a social minimum be invented for the Caribbean Netherlands when there is no regionally oriented framework for this in the European Netherlands either? It is true that money flows to the Caribbean Netherlands (*more to Bonaire because people there protest more vehemently?*) but it is a lot simpler and fairer when the national system applies everywhere (this applies, by the way, in all policy areas except when there are *substantial* differences with the situation in the European Netherlands, according to the Constitution). The socioeconomic differences we observe are not of a *substantial* nature; indeed, they are not the *cause* but the *result* of government policies mentioned above in a discriminatory way. Moreover: adjusting the budget (as recently triumphantly reported again by the Cabinet in the context of the Spring Memorandum) is nice, but can just as easily be undone or omitted. No, the real, structural solution lies in recognizing Caribbean Dutch citizens as full-fledged Dutch citizens in one legal framework.

It should be noted that this letter focuses on the social context (*including the unemployment benefit, which does not exist in the Caribbean Netherlands*) but that in many policy areas unnecessary differences and exceptions have been captured in BES legislation: all that needs to be corrected. And

by the way, BES is too broad a context: the constitutionally argued substantive differences from the European Netherlands naturally apply per island (Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius).

I am not entirely alone in this criticism: the Court of Audit - in its annual assessment on Accountability Day - also rates the government's policy on this component as "worrisome" (a 2 on a scale of 5) ¹. I hope that your committee will address the government about this and call it to order. *Discrimination has no place in the Netherlands!*

Kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman*

¹ Chapter 5 of <https://www.rekenkamer.nl/binaries/rekenkamer/documenten/rapporten/2023/05/17/resultaten-verantwoordingsonderzoek-2022-koninkrijksrelaties-en-bes-fonds/IV+KR+BES-fund+WR.pdf> deals with this here. This chapter is in <https://english.rekenkamer.nl/publications/publications/2023/05/17/intervention-in-st-eustatius> in English.