

The Hague, June 17, 2023.

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

The Cabinet - the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations first and foremost - has just recovered from the shock after three scathing rulings on the conduct of the Executive Council of St. Eustatius directed by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and directly by them with regard to the cliff hazard on the Caribbean side of the island and Orangebay Hotel/Ecostatia. Let me be clear: this has nothing to do with any malfunctioning or not of the civil service there. The reports in question were deliberately kept under wraps by the then government commissioner. Driven by the scare, suddenly about seven million euros came out of governmental budget to start urgent repair work.

And now the report of the Environmental and Transport Inspectorate [ILT]. For those who have not read the letters from concerned residents of St. Eustatius, the various columns in 'dossierkoninkrijksrelaties.nl', messages from nature organizations such as Stenapa and various articles in various (especially Caribbean) newspapers, this is indeed a big shock. And not only a big scare: the experience is also painful. Very painful because - if I limit myself to St. Eustatius (Statia) - I can report to you that what is now being found by the government itself has been known for a long time, and has also been reported to the authorities. But yes, looking away and tolerating is pretty much the national hobby of this Cabinet.

Most striking in this report is that the Public Entity of St. Eustatius (OLE) did not respond to any request for clarification or submission of documents. Perhaps needless to say, in 2018 the administration of St. Eustatius was taken over by government commissioners appointed and directed directly by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations; with a growing group of advisors in their wake.

At the start of construction of the Golden Rock Resort, the work began with the clearing of the lot without a permit, accompanied by a great deal of dust nuisance for local residents. For the permit for this clear-cutting and related permits, I did my own research but did not get much further than the same boxes and walls over and over again. Even then I had serious doubts whether these permits existed at all. Should the necessary permits now be available, it would be the result of a good exercise in fixing imperfections after the fact. It is absolutely conceivable that this course of action was widely used.

Note: To date, decisions of the Executive Council are hardly published or very hard to find. Many times I have asked to indicate where the decisions can be found. To no avail.

Note: Digging a very deep pool - called a diving pond in the report - for the purpose of diving lessons, irresponsibly close to the edge with the open sea in unstable volcanic soil is absolutely out of bounds. Even a layman can see that and sense that this is waiting for accidents, but the government likes to be fooled.

The arrival of foreign workers also raised many questions about compliance with quarantine and hygiene obligations during the corona period. It was as if these restrictive measures simply did not apply to them.

It is recommendable to read the annex to the report on St. Eustatius to get a good idea of what was going on. Together with the report of the Court of Audit on the impact of the intervention on St. Eustatius, presented on May 17, 2023, a good picture emerges. And that is a very disturbing, worrisome and money-wasting picture.

A single word on three other topics:

- The Minister of I&W announces that the budget required for intereiland air travel as public transportation is not in his budget. This raises the following question for me: who actually sponsors unprofitable public transport connections in less densely populated areas in the European Netherlands?
- Have initiatives already been shown to organize and finance care in the Caribbean Netherlands in a European Dutch manner? I am thinking here of, among other things, compulsory health insurance with additional options and also care allowance. All this just like in the European Netherlands. Because that is how the norm is: 'comply or explain'. The negative 2018 report by the Health Care Inspectorate was never followed up. Surely it's about time for that, too.
- At a very recent meeting of the Parliamentary Commission of OCW and young artists in the Netherlands, it once again revealed something that is also sorely missed in the fight against poverty in the Caribbean Netherlands: a condition-free guaranteed basic income for everyone (with simultaneous abolition of various benefits and allowances). It is talked about regularly but taking the step is still quite difficult.

I realize that Members of Parliament are often busy with the issues of the day. But the islands of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba are really municipalities of the European Netherlands, so just as normal or special as all the other places in the country 'the Netherlands'. So they also deserve equal treatment. That such a thing is not common is verging on discriminatory.

With kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman*