

The Hague, August 10, 2023.

Dear members of the House of Representatives and Senate,

Regularly I think about how hospitable we actually are. And then not only for foreigners from, for example, war zones (think Ukraine), but also for Dutch citizens from the Dutch Caribbean. And then again and again I come to the finding: "not so hospitable!".

The local residents, nota bene, are the same kind of Dutch people as you and me, yet our government does everything in its power not to grant them the same Dutch rights. I won't start again about the well-known BSN that is not even made available upon request. You only get such a thing when you register with a Dutch municipality on this side of the ocean. But you must then have a Dutch address because that is where the BSN assigned to you will be sent. How do you come up with that? You only have such an address if you have been able to arrange accommodation through friends or family. Actually, hospitality is not an issue here: we apparently prefer to keep the Caribbean Dutchman out. Earlier I described this as institutional discrimination. But no, I wouldn't bring this up....

Let me see how the Caribbean Netherlands "falls" at the various ministries. Then a demarcation problem starts almost immediately: is a case to be dealt with at minBZK, or at the line ministry (minI&W, minVWS, minSZW, minOCW or the like)? You can safely say that the average civil servant (of any ministry) does not count Caribbean Netherlands as his or her working area when policy or legislation is at issue. West or south of the North Sea coast or Belgian border one cannot imagine Dutch residents. Unless you are in the "fortunate" circumstance of taking a (service) trip there (no, not Curaçao or Aruba, but one of the three BES islands: Bonaire, St. Eustatius or Saba) but then the official's proverbial hat is not aimed at equality with the European Netherlands, but rather there is room for one's own agenda in which there is room for hiking, diving or snorkeling in the ocean. Also administrators (in government) who make such a visit have shortly after returning to the European Netherlands forgotten how disadvantaged the Caribbean Netherlands is compared to the European Netherlands. They cry foul about the poverty, for example, but do not think "really crazy, the Netherlands, but not the same rights"; doing something about it is too much to ask anyway.

When the decision was made in 2010 to incorporate the three small islands into the country of the Netherlands (as a public body, say "special municipality") the reasoning for a long time, and in fact still is, based on "how it was" (Netherlands Antilles) and certainly not on "how it should be" (the Netherlands). No, not only civil servants, also ministers and state secretaries, did not start from "this is also the Netherlands" but from "oh yes, we also have to do something with that..." and this is how a lot of BES legislation came about. Some BES legislation is justifiable because the circumstances on the islands are so essentially different from those in the European Netherlands that it is almost self-evident. Take the climate: the islands are in the tropics. Who then thinks of regulations on central heating, for example? Everyone sees and understands that the climate is "different" (on the BES islands compared to the European Netherlands). But take unemployment benefits: is being unemployed in Groningen, Limburg or Randstad now substantially different from being unemployed in, say, St. Eustatius? I would think not. Yet the Caribbean Netherlands has no unemployment benefit.

And as already noted: this construction with a European and a Caribbean Netherlands has existed since October 2010!

Another example. In the newspaper I read about the desire of PostNL to adjust the legislation because the standard on the delivery of mail set by law would not (or could not) be achieved. Quite apart from the fact that when you fail to meet a standard, you actually have to work harder and not lower the standard, I note that when the newspaper article in question talks about the Netherlands, only European Netherlands is meant. To also assign postal codes to the Caribbean Netherlands or standards regarding the speed of delivery seems - until now - too much to ask. It takes the mail a few weeks but it seems no one cares. And perhaps I should not call this institutional discrimination, at the very least it is gross neglect of a care task.

Several examples can be cited, all in different policy areas (health care, public transportation, land use planning, etc.). The commonality in all these examples is that laws and regulations are defined differently (or not). And if there were an essential distinction between the Caribbean and the European Netherlands, it should at least be mentioned in the relevant laws and regulations. The distinction should also be substantial in nature. I explain that. The BSN is not there because the municipal administration is conducted differently. That is the result of agreements made, so not a substantial distinction. Agreements could just as easily have been made differently (that doesn't happen for municipalities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, does it?).

Why is income tax in the Caribbean Netherlands based on a fixed rate instead of a progressive rate as in the European Netherlands. Don't the strongest shoulders have to bear the heaviest burden there? On the contrary, is the fortunate part of the population kept out of the wind? And what is the reason for the different legislation here? And while on the subject of money: why not 'just' the euro instead of the US dollar?

It is not my intention to list here an exhaustive list of differences; rather my intention is to call attention to this point. The Caribbean and the European Netherlands are equal and should also be treated as equal. And do not come up with concealing terms like "equal" because that is not how the Constitution works. And surely the Constitution is the guide by which legislation for our country is drafted?

Enforcement is another such thing. The fact that the operator of the Golden Rock Resort on St. Eustatius simply cuts down trees, builds roads etc. as he sees fit without any permit is actually a bit strange. And when the official responsible for permits at the Public Entity of St. Eustatius is now suddenly the general manager of the same Golden Rock Resort, it is remarkable to say the least. In the European Netherlands we are quite keen on this, but about seven thousand kilometers southwest of us: well, there they just do as they please, and no one gives a damn. That's true, because as soon as you speak out about it, you're no longer sure of your job. Intimidation is fairly normal in the Dutch Caribbean. For The Hague it is mainly a matter of will! And we would rather go there for the sun or a nice swim in the ocean (or for the inexplicably fiscally attractive climate). For the abuses there, we prefer to look away.

My hope that the Kingdom Relations Committee will take notice and call the responsible ministers to account has so far proved vain. I am therefore addressing the entire Parliament (and the Ombudsman) in the hope that someone can still be found with some sense of administrative responsibility. My trust in government has always been self-evident and unconditional. My observations in a broad sense over the last few years, as well as more specifically in the realm of kingdom relations, means that that self-evidence and unconditionality are beginning to show cracks. In other words, the increasing breach of trust (of the citizen in the government) that the media is talking about I understand very well!

Sincerely,

J.H.T. (Jan) Meijer MSc MBA,
Cornelis Houtmanstraat 9-b,
2593 RD The Hague.

T +31 6 31 79 58 57 (for SMS and WhatsApp)

E jhtm.nl@gmail.com

W <http://statia.nu> or <http://statia.nu/nl>

cc: *National Ombudsman*