

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

*A word in advance: the account from which this mail was written is our account (Jan Meijer and Mia van Deelen). However, the mail is - like all my mail to you - written on a personal title: that of Jan Meijer, as shown by the "signature block" which (because it is a mail) of course does not really contain a signature.*

In preparation for your meeting on 19 December next (item 4 of the agenda: "St. Eustatius progress report") I hereby give you my comments on the letter from the State Secretary to the Lower House of Parliament dated 14 November this year.

All this in connection with a mail I wrote earlier (in my evening of 12 November 2018, for you it was now 13 November 2018 ;-)) as well as with a mail I just sent to you, in response to the comment I was allowed to read this afternoon on the site of [koninkrijksrelaties.nu](https://koninkrijksrelaties.nu) (see <https://koninkrijksrelaties.nu/2018/12/17/commentaar-i-verkiezingen/>).

Now for my comments in the order in which I find them in the letter of Secretary of State Knops (I do not claim to have an exhaustive overview here).

1. In general it is an easy to read, informative and extensive letter. It's a pity that it appeared "just like that" to the inhabitants of the island. None of this has - to my knowledge - been discussed in advance in any public forum whatsoever. An English version is unfortunately also missing (still!): the local population is English-speaking here.

2. There is talk about the small scale of the island - on page 2 - which would contribute to the easy dissemination of information. This should not be overestimated. Facebook is indeed a reasonably accepted and generally accepted means of communication on the island but there is no "official" Facebook page from the local government. The website of the local government seems to be back in use but is not very up to date (the last townhall meeting published concerns the one of 10 September, while afterwards three more took place: 13 November about the deposit guarantee scheme, 29 November about the prison and 13 December about infrastructural projects. Minutes of the Executive Council can be found but they are not meaningful without the availability of the underlying documents. Minutes of the discussion with the Advisory Board are not available on the website, contrary to what the letter states.

3. On page 3 it says that market parties should actually take up the flight connections, but of course it does help if the RCN allows its staff to fly with the new connections to be set up instead of with the unreliable Insel Air. There was a good development with the opening up of St. Eustatius (and Saba) via connections with Curacao, Aruba and Bonaire, but they died an early death. An important argument shortly after Hurricane Irma was that the small islands should be independent from St. Maarten. This argument has been pushed into the background.

4. At the bottom of page 4 it says "As the Cabinet shares this context with you, [...]". It has been taken from my heart, but it seems as if the government commissioner has a very different view on this. The townhall meetings are in the context of "announcements of what is going to happen", in the sense of more or less pre-chewed chunks of information. In the phase of planning or project development, I do not know how to share information with "the population and its spokespersons".

5. Page 5 refers to the Van den Berg motion with a plea for an integrated multi-annual administrative agreement per island with result obligations. I say: DOEN! But I haven't seen or heard anything else about it.

6. On page 6 we talk about developments in the personnel and financial domain. They sound promising. On 2 October, the government commissioner submitted a Plan of Action with almost 90 action points. I assume that they have been discussed with those directly involved and you may be familiar with the content of this Plan of Action. Here on the island, this Outline Proposal is not known in the broad sense. I hope that it also contains points that are considered to be of local importance. For example, in an e-mail to the Finance Committee - dated 14 November 2018 - of the Lower House (cc: your committee), I argued in favour of the allocation of

Citizen Service Numbers (BSN) for all Statians (or more broadly: for all inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands). I have no idea if this point is part of the almost 90 action points mentioned.

7. On page 7 the function of a court of auditors for the three islands of the Dutch Caribbean is recalled. This point is strongly endorsed by me.

8. Page 8 discusses the connection that is being sought with the population administration in (European) the Netherlands. Here, too, I would like to draw attention to my plea for everyone to be granted a BSN. In this context, I have taken note of the introduction - as of March 2019 - of a Digid desk at the tax office of Bonaire. I think it would be a good development if this were not limited to just Bonaire (about 900 km away from St. Eustatius and Saba), but if the other two BES islands would also be provided with such a desk.

9. The fact that in October 2018 a number of employees were trained to become webmasters (page 8) could easily be the case, but I haven't seen anything from an up-to-date website yet.

10. On pages 8 et seq. it is stated that the decision about the elections will be taken on 1 September 2019. The tone and direction of this decision are subject to a dozen conditions. It seems to me that an action plan needs to be developed on this. However, the 'list of projects' annexed to the letter to the House of Representatives makes no mention of this.

11. On pages 14 and 15, reference is made to waste disposal by EIJ Services. This company is doing an extremely good job. To date, this company has also taken care of the collection of the waste contributions due. This is rightly seen as a government task and this collection will therefore be carried out by the local government as of January 2019. I am aware of this primarily because of a report from the company in question. Through the mail I also receive the so-called Statianews (you can sign up for this mailing) and on 5 December there will be Announcement nr 011/18 AIS in which all this is also reported. However, there are no details so that I have stopped my periodic transfer (order to the bank) but have not yet reset it. I have to wait for an assessment.

12. On page 15 the investor of Guyeau Estate is mentioned. He will intelligently produce drinking water from seawater for his investment. Asking his supplier (Mr. Sid Vollebregt of Elemental Water Makers) learns that this technique can also be applied on an island wide scale, making the water production cheaper. What is required is the willingness of Stuco (a government-NV) to innovate and change. This must be seen in relation to what is stated about water production on pages 10 and 11 of the parliamentary letter. However, I do not yet see any initiative being taken in this respect.

13. On page 17, under the heading "Finally" (ref. first paragraph under this heading), a rosier picture is given of the communication than that experienced by the latter. My opinion is that communication via the website does not take place sufficiently, via Facebook does not take place, via the aforementioned forums (Social Council of Advice and Cooperative Platform) to the best of my knowledge takes place marginally (on subjects such as street signs and renovating the walls around the cemeteries) and with the population - for example in the context of the townhall meeting(s) - only when participation is virtually impossible or undesirable anyway.

With these points, I hope to have supported you in dealing with point 4 of your sitting. For the record, I should like to make a final comment. My points are rather critical. Nevertheless, I should like to emphasise that I wholeheartedly endorse the speech of 7 February this year. It is (also) my opinion and conviction that this project cannot or should not actually fail. But it seems to me that transparency and pro-active communication have so far received insufficient attention, while it is precisely these points that are considered crucial to the success of the project. The local population's perception that "the Netherlands is a culprit" must be translated 180 degrees through repeated and effective communication.

Kind regards,

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