

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

Minister Knops recently informed the Lower House about the progress in the developments on St. Eustatius. He gives a consideration on the basis of (mainly) the administrative domain, the social domain and the physical domain. Despite setbacks here and there, the report mainly gives a positive picture.

On the one hand I would rather not detract from this positive image; on the other hand, I still believe that the Statian world in the report is seen through glasses that are too coloured.

Perhaps the comparison I made earlier (the Roman Empire versus the small village of Asterix and Obelix in Gaul that systematically withdraws from the Roman occupation) should be taken more seriously than I initially intended it to be.

After all, here Dutch thoughts, opinions, norms and methods are easily used as a reference in tackling local problems. This is explainable - after all, it is mainly Dutch officials who come to do a "job" "for a while" - but the question is whether this is desirable, and whether it works.

In my conversation with the government commissioner so much became clear to me that he sees his assignment as a technically orientated checklist with points such as bringing the civil status in order, bringing the financial management in order, etc. With the people on the island, insofar as they do not work in his immediate working environment, he does not have much and the future of the island as well as the reconsideration of the relationship of St. Eustatius with the European Netherlands do not form part of his view of tasks. It goes a little far to say that he is not interested in these matters either, but that is the impression he gives me every day. As a true interim manager, he does his things "in the narrow sense", the rest is - literally - not his business.

In my opinion, a good relationship with the population is the key to success! Especially when you are interested and questioning, you experience what is really needed the quickest and how it can best be shaped. Of course, I won't deny that, the financial management and the civil status have to be in order, and I'm not in the business so I can easily miss the point here, but the fact that our village hasn't got these preconditions in order after almost two years, surprises me.

Note: The saying is "don't rub a stain", so I won't put too many words into it, but amazement is also part of the conclusion that after two years of involvement, the parties involved haven't managed to 'score' just any physically perceptible progress in the road renovation project.

Searching for matters related to communication and information (to be shared with the population) I come across the paragraph 'Communication plan' (on page 3): so many fine words ('strategic plan', 'house style', 'streamlining') about only the 'packaging' in which the content - the actual provision of information - actually does not change, improves, increases in frequency or whatever. It reminds me of another document, a financial overview of projects, dated April 11, 2019, in which two projects are mentioned - upgrading website and translation website - which together are estimated at 68 k-dollar, certainly by Statian standards more than a year's salary. What happened to this budget is unknown to me, the website www.statiagovernment.com looks at least all this time unchanged (apart from details such as the format of the discussion reports; these were and still are incomprehensible, but now the text is nicely framed).

I conclude. The importance of the progress report seems to me mainly lies in what has not been written. The intervention directed by the Netherlands has so far taken place without treating the local population with respect and involving them in the necessary changes in the various areas. The communication with the Social Council of Advice is a joke: it is a shambles that suggests that the intervention and the resulting projects and activities take place in consultation (and that is absolutely

not true). My advice (perhaps too short, but from the heart): "acknowledge the wrong start and start again with a new team".

With kind regards,

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Note: It is true that I realise that in all my letters I almost always address the same theme: respect for the Statian residents by talking to them about the future and how to shape it (in townhall meetings with an open agenda), instead of talking above their heads about them but with advisors from - mainly - the European Netherlands. To date, you have been taking my input 'for notice' without actually doing anything with it. This is the way things are done in a parliamentary democracy; it goes without saying that you make your own considerations within the palette of problem and attention points that you have before you. For the time being, I am assuming, I will continue to inform you of my findings with regard to the administrative intervention on our island and the ensuing developments.

Note: It is by chance that this mail was sent on 15 December 2019: exactly 65 years ago, the Statute was signed. I have noticed in recent years that this day - King's Day - has meaning on the Caribbean islands, while in the European Netherlands this day generally goes by unnoticed.