

Dear Chairman and members of the Finance Committee of the Lower House of Parliament,

I have noted with interest the letter from the Minister of Finance dated January 29th concerning banking services in the BES islands. The last sentence of the letter is an incentive for me to write this e-mail. After all, the Minister is alert to further possibilities for improvements in the banking services in the Caribbean Netherlands. In that context I would like - through your intervention - to submit the following to him.

As of mid 2014 I live and work on St. Eustatius and I will receive my salary (of course in US dollars) on my account at the local WIB bank. Sometimes I transfer money to my account at a Dutch bank (which I already had when I lived and worked in the European Netherlands).

Take last December (2019). I transfer 3000 euro from the WIB bank to my NL bank. From my account at the WIB-bank 3374,58 US dollar will be debited. That seems to me to be justified, because it indicates a rate of 1.12486 US dollar for 1 euro and that might well be true. However, also my WIB-account is being debited...

- "swift charges usd" a 26.54 US dollars as well as
- "transfer charges usd" a 10.06 US dollars.

Upon receipt on my NL-account another "transfer commission" a 6,00 euro will be withheld. Actually I just transfer money from one account to another and that costs me about 38,54 euro.

*Note: In this case I transfer 3000 euros; I don't know the tariff structure completely, but if - for example - I transfer 1000 euros, the costs are identical.*

If I take US dollars from the local ATM with the bank card of my NL-bank, it also costs me 7,50 US dollars per transaction.

I don't know if the minister has included these kinds of transactions in his research, but it seems to me that the banks won't make any losses on these transactions at all.

In his letter the minister mentions under the heading "Euro payment account", among other things, the assumption that local payment transactions are made with the US dollar. I wonder whether this principle is immutable. There seems to be no indisputable rationale behind it, because in the (nearby) region there is the Eastern Caribbean Dollar, the Euro and the Antillean guilder. It would be much more logical if on St. Eustatius (and Saba, and why not on all former Netherlands Antilles?) the euro would be introduced. In my opinion the financial market on the islands would only become more accessible by the (European) Dutch banks (and my "case" as outlined above - i.e. relatively many costs for money from one (own) account to another - disappears like snow in the sun ;-)

*Note: Assuming that NL banks take over the role of the WIB bank (at least on Sint Eustatius), the "weaving error" that the Dutch central bank is not the supervisor of the bank operating on Sint Eustatius is also eliminated.*

Under this heading, the Minister also mentions identification as one of the obstacles to be taken. I understand this obstacle and it seems to me perfectly solvable when the route to the BSN is open to Dutch Caribbean citizens who want to open a Euro payment account. Young Stavian citizens who want to start a study in the European Netherlands after finishing their secondary school would also benefit greatly from a BSN and a Euro payment account (at a NL bank) in their preparation for their transfer to the European Netherlands.

May I ask your Commission to take these points to heart and ask the Minister to address them (in the context of the improved banking services in the BES islands that he intends to provide). In concrete terms, I am referring to:

- high transaction costs when transferring from WIB bank to NL bank and vice versa;
- high transaction costs when withdrawing at ATM with a NL bank card;
- euro as local currency;
- Caribbean Dutch people who want to open a Euro payment account should also be able to get a BSN.

Kind regards,

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*In copy to: Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission*