

Dear Chairman and members of the Commission on Kingdom Relations,

I hereby offer you my appreciation of the results of the elections on St. Eustatius. The day after the elections I read on the website of the local government: PLP 815, DP 647 and UPC 124. In anticipation of the official results, I will make my own calculations: 3 seats for PLP and 2 seats for DP.

This result is broadly comparable with the proportions as they were prior to the intervention of the Dutch government in February 2018. Briefly put, I would like to note that we have completed a period of two and a half years of complete standstill, after which I too am curious how the restart will go.

It doesn't suit me to bathe myself and moreover I don't know the details (how should I know them with such a low level of government transparency) but that it takes more than two and a half years to put the various administrations in order in terms of population and finances, with all the help that is and can be called upon from the European Netherlands, seems somewhat unbelievable to me. It concerns a population of about three thousand and an annual budget of fifteen to twenty million dollars. Once again, it does not suit me to say: "how difficult can it be?", but the fact that this thought comes to mind in me (and also in you?) seems explainable to me.

On the island - if I listen carefully - it is widely understood that setting aside Dutch legislation (i.e. WolBES and FinBES) as if it did not apply to St. Eustatius, as well as making scratchy statements about what to do with possible Dutch soldiers on St. Eustatius, have been a bit "over the top" and give rise to "angry words" from the Netherlands. Really punishable was - apparently - nobody because criminal consequences did not take place. To keep a long story short: a Commission of Wise Men conducted an investigation and the local government was dissolved, after which a government commissioner started to put things in order.

In the beginning, as I have always seen and expressed this way, I looked forward to the Dutch intervention with an optimistic feeling. After all, supported by the European Netherlands, the path of democracy would be followed. Exchange of points of view, discussion and consultation, wanting to listen to each other, coming to a consensus and actually realizing that consensual plan: that is the ultimate "game" that leads to a more prosperous future. That the European Netherlands has an advantage in this learning process of years, if not centuries, is obvious.

But that "together" has not happened, or at least not enough. Perhaps something has been learned in the context of this or that administration: I have not been there. But in terms of "how does democracy work", "how does consensus building work", "how to think about the future and make and realize a

plan from there": there has been absolutely no exchange of ideas on these subjects with the population of the island. Not a single townhall meeting has taken place with this very open agenda, focused on the coming together of thinking and worldviews.

When I charge a bit, on the Statian side the idea prevails that although the umbrella of the Kingdom of the Netherlands offers a lot of "(social and financial) security", the rest of the (European) Netherlands is not really interested and above all dominantly present without really reaching out a helping hand. The parable of receiving fish versus learning the skills of the fisherman is a common one. The Dutchman "says how it should be done" and leaves it at that. There is not really an ambition to guide people. That only takes time and is difficult.

From the point of view of the European Netherlands, St. Eustatius is little more than a small village, about half the size of Vlieland, with a number of inhabitants, about the same as Ameland. If something goes wrong in an administrative sense (and political gain is suspected!), then an intervention that attracts a lot of publicity (with decision-making in the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament at the same time!) with a precedent that is no more recent than the intervention in the board of Finsterwolde in 1951, appears to be worthwhile. Well, and not so much after that. In terms of "developments in democracy" the local world has stood still here for about two and a half years and has not really worked on an improved bond between both parties (i.e. the European Netherlands and St. Eustatius). Opportunities to do so have remained. In other words, after that the neglect of St. Eustatius by The Hague began...

The idea that politics in the Netherlands is conducted on a national as well as on a municipal level by parties with agendas that are completely different in scope, is a totally unknown world for the Statian. I have sometimes argued in local conversations that - in view of the national elections in March 2021 - Statians should also take note of the programmes of the national political parties in the European Netherlands. After all, St. Eustatius is also represented on a national level by parties participating in the elections of March 2021. However, there is absolutely no such idea here, and in my opinion a lot of work could have been done in this field over the past two years. If only the parties had spoken to each other in earnest and listened to each other with interest.

Now that the PLP has won and the old relations have taken a stand again, I may hope that the government commissioner is effective in his cooperation with the new Island Council. If I measure this effectiveness against what has been achieved in the past months or years, I am not too optimistic.

I have no doubt that the State Secretary will inform you in a more positive way but at least then you have my word as "counterweight". What you do with it, I will not, cannot and may not prescribe to you. I can only hope for wisdom on your part.

Kind regards,

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In an 'epilogue' three more notes which, in my opinion, are not all-decisive or of decisive importance, but which do determine the atmosphere in which communication takes place on the island.

- On Monday- and Thursday evening in principle the radio broadcasts take place (starting at 19.00 hours) with corona-, election- and other news from the side of the government commissioner. For the record: this is all one-way communication, not the ideal (two-way) communication I mentioned earlier. The times that these broadcasts went ahead or started on time are in the minority. Broadcasts are cancelled or delayed without notice. In this way, reliability and credibility as pillars of government communication erode more than the rock on which Fort Oranje stands is crumbling as a result of the goats' behavior.
- On Caribisch Netwerk I read that government commissioner Van Rij considers it possible that St. Eustatius can go through the steps faster in order to completely return to democracy. He said this on the day of the elections (October 21, 2020). The day after, Kingdom.nu heads for "Setback for politics The Hague: PLP again the largest on St. Eustatius". I am curious if Van Rij's optimistic view will be maintained after this PLP victory. You can hope that the government commissioner really stands 'above' the parties and tries to monetize his optimism.
- In the national newspapers I read of some fuss about the filled church in Staphorst because article 6 of the Constitution is respected in the (European) Netherlands. Our government commissioner (with a CDA-background) has chosen not to exclude the churches in the local ordinances. In short, there are no church services because meetings with more than a certain number of people are forbidden. In my opinion, the same effect could have been achieved if the government commissioner had requested the church leaders to suspend church services until further notice and thus respectfully use the 'natural' authority of the church leaders on the religious St. Eustatius. I had already pointed this point out to him (the government commissioner), but he never discussed the content.