

Dear Chairman and members of the Commission on Kingdom Relations,

Now that the dust of the elections has settled on Statia, it is time to take a closer look. PLP has won and the two-man faction of the DP has fallen apart: Adelka Spanner occupies the DP seat and also Koos Sneek keeps his seat and for the time being continues political life as Lijst Sneek. So instead of a seat ratio of three PLP, two DP, it now becomes three PLP, one DP and one List Sneek.

Whatever the cause of this DP-break and whoever is right, the outward appearance does not get any better. Let me think about this "*image to the outside*". Of course it all started with the intervention of February 2018. The reason for this was the alleged disregard for the law and the unfortunate statement by Clyde van Putten, done on Curaçao, about 'what to do with Dutch soldiers should they come to St. Eustatius'. When an intervention then follows, you of course quickly get a comparative picture of the rebellious 'province' of Taiwan against the large and powerful People's Republic of China (I will leave the comparison of the Gallic village against the Roman Empire this time).

The image in the European Netherlands is then quickly "*good that there is intervention, that behavior of the local leadership is not acceptable*". I indicated earlier that I was initially on that course as well. I was thinking about that: "now the European Netherlands will help in setting up good governance". After that, I really can't make it any better, nothing really happened. For me, too, that was a failure of great order. No consultation, no transparency, just a black box in which something simmered, at least that you could assume. And no criminal prosecution either. It may not have been nice and a correction would have been appropriate, but an intervention that has been unparalleled for almost seventy years, well that doesn't seem proportional to me.

Of course I won't forget the incidental infrastructural projects that have taken place, but they have nothing at all to do with the intervention in democracy. The only thing that I could say is that the new street signs and house numbers have undoubtedly contributed to an improvement in population administration. When Mr. Van Raak notes that since the intervention approximately 65 million euros have been invested in the island, I take the liberty of noting that a significant part of this money was already earmarked for infrastructural projects which - if all went well - would have been dealt with anyway. No, none of this has anything to do with the restoration of democracy. There is only one 'medicine' for this and that is consultation, listening to each other and trying to achieve the best compromise. This 'medicine' has been carefully left in the medicine cabinet.

Talking about medicine, with the threat of Covid19 the hospitainer has been put down with a lot of fuss; in the meantime the local government has also admitted that this is not a matter of intensive care at all - as initially proclaimed by the government commissioner - or of an increased care otherwise, but only of an expansion of the hospital's bed capacity.

In the meantime, State Secretary Knops has visited the island council, which was already there at the time. I won't say too many words about the fact that because of the vulnerability of the island he shouldn't come at all <sup>1</sup>, but what should probably be a triumphal march has already been characterized by the website 'kingdom.nu' on 22 October 2020 (the day after the elections) as "*Setback for politics The Hague: PLP again the largest on St. Eustatius*". I had already stated that with only infrastructural projects and without proper consultation, you won't get there. The Statian population is not crazy! I therefore find it a downright shortcoming when I see Knops being quoted - ref. 'kingdom.nu' dated November 4, 2020 - with "*A lot is happening on St. Eustatius*" referring to the construction of new roads and the construction of a new airport terminal". What is said is correct, but there is not so much "*much*" as "*far too little*" and I am of course referring to the substantive consultation, aimed at a well and effectively governed Public Entity with tasks and responsibilities of the central government as well as tasks and responsibilities of the local, Statian government. To achieve a situation with a helping hand and good guidance from the Dutch central government.

Back to the "*image to the outside*" of St. Eustatius (about which I started in the second paragraph of this letter). A reaction to a previous letter from my hand spoke of a "doom and gloom" on the island. I tried to refute that reaction but in a continuing discussion it became increasingly clear to me that those who are initiated generally know "how things are" but for the general public it is mainly "*a difficult island*" with "*stubborn people*" proclaiming "*all sorts of nonsense*". Moreover, this image is reinforced by (newspaper) headlines such as "*Setback for politics The Hague*", "*Bumblebee in newly elected island council St. Eustatius*" (both headlines: 'kingdom.nu') or Mr. Van Raak's call for a referendum on St. Eustatius (whether or not to remain in the Kingdom of the Netherlands) because one doesn't like the election result! These are headlines and statements that focus on the emotions of the general public and do not affect *the content*.

The fact that the key to success on St. Eustatius is only partly on the island itself may be recognized by the renewed PLP. The other part of the success lies in (the consultation in or at least with) The Hague. I hope that the new Island Council, under the leadership of the majority (the PLP therefore), will be able to find its way to The Hague in order to establish contacts with the various institutions there as well (House of Representatives, Association of Dutch Municipalities, individual political parties with an equally focused 'profile', individual departments, and possibly various other), aimed at and contributing to good, effective communication between the Netherlands and St. Eustatius. A

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<sup>1</sup> I've mentioned the 'New Zealand' model before where the borders are extremely well guarded and everyone, without exception, has to undergo a fourteen day quarantine upon entry. Within the country itself there is then a corona-free situation in which behaviour is quite free (let's just say "the former normal"). St. Eustatius is a (squeaky) small New Zealand where the borders are fairly well guarded (so that can be done much better!) and quarantine is reasonably arranged (but also that can be done much better!). Within the corona-free island, however, the government commissioner is still talking a lot of fear and the social traffic is somewhat enlightened but still quite limited. I would like to know what the specialists would advise us in this respect.

communication that is necessary to make it clear that the path that the European Netherlands advocates is by no means the only good path. After all, there are more paths that lead to the proverbial Rome.

The local parties will - I am convinced - be more concerned about the things that Stavian residents consider important. This in contrast to the government commissioner who - when it comes down to it - simply does what he is told to do from The Hague. Take mobility as an example (perhaps an example that has lost its importance in the Covid19 pandemic, but will nevertheless prove to be an important aspect in the future). Have I ever seen the government commissioner worry about the high fares of the monopolist Winair and about the possibility of diversity in the supply of flights when connecting to Bonaire? <sup>2 3</sup> Another example: somehow the civil-law notary of Sint Maarten turns out to be more important (?) than that of the 'own' BES group <sup>4</sup>, as the law also describes (with a maximum of two positions on Bonaire and one for Statia and Saba together: I am referring to the BES Notary's Act). Why is this the case? I have no idea. The services of civil-law notaries on Sint Maarten are not widely known as super-client friendly. For that reason alone you should probably look elsewhere to see if there is something better available.

If Prime Minister Rutte advises against travelling and at the same time considers the Caribbean parts to be part of the *interior* (for which many people have to travel in an airplane...) <sup>5</sup> then I would like to receive this message positively, but when it comes to other things than travelling, then suddenly the Kingdom is not so inclusive anymore <sup>6</sup>. It seems to me an example of incorrect, unjustified and opportunistic language. Think, for example, of the discussion about the social minimum as it applies in the European Netherlands versus as it applies in the Dutch Caribbean, or the different benefits in both 'Netherlands' (e.g. unemployment, etc.). The Board of Human Rights also has knowledge of the second-class position of the Dutch Caribbean citizen, but as yet little or nothing changes. It seems to me a disgrace that should lead to a broad equality operation: in my opinion led by your Commission!

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<sup>2</sup> A look at the flight possibilities shows that KLM, as far as the Caribbean is concerned, focuses mainly on the Leeward Islands and less on the Windward Islands (read: Sint Maarten). This also has consequences for something perfectly normal (at least in the Netherlands in the broad sense ...) such as mail delivery. Mail from and to St. Eustatius effortlessly takes four, six or even eight weeks to cross the Atlantic Ocean. A 'proof of being alive' that arrives too late at a pension-paying institution in this way then leads to a discontinuation of pension benefits. Very un-Dutch I would think...

<sup>3</sup> In the information on the radio by the plv government commissioner there is easy talk about the Caricom or BES bubble (within which travel could easily take place). Nice theoretical concepts with which no one can do anything because there are simply no flights.

<sup>4</sup> The government commissioner even calls such a notary from St. Maarten essential or vital (as it suits him) in order to bring the official in without quarantine. *From infected St. Maarten in particular...*

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/curacao-in-trek-als-vakantiebestemming-na-persconferentie-rutte~bd78421b/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.nl%2F> dated November 4th 2020.

<sup>6</sup> In its election programme, the VVD has expressed a preference for a Commonwealth of independent countries placed outside the Kingdom. *The inhabitants of the Caribbean islands only have to choose for themselves...*

I can do little other than rely on your wisdom. For the time being, I see that your Committee follows all developments somewhat passively and informs me that the letter of notification has been accepted. For the record: I am not waiting for fireworks but I would like you to put the interests of the Statian (and by the way second-class) Dutch on the agenda as well. Of course with due priority but with *some* priority instead of no priority at all.

Thank you in advance and with kind regards,

J.H.T. (Jan) Meijer MSc MBA,  
Bellevue Road 4, Upper Round Hill,  
St. Eustatius, Dutch Caribbean.