

St. Eustatius, October 1st, 2021.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

Thank you for the personal way in which you indicated to me today that several of my letters to you have been received. That in the future you will not acknowledge receipt of each new letter and that you will continue to read (and appreciate: I quote your words here) my contributions. I feel honored, at the same time I realize that I immerse myself daily in the everyday life on St. Eustatius, while in the broader view of things St. Eustatius is of course only a very small element in your agenda.

In order to (continue to) view my views and writings in a proper context, I would like to note the following in this regard. I have been living here for seven years now (I am working on my eighth year as a math teacher at the secondary school on the island). In my work I naturally meet the school children and of some of them I also periodically meet their parents. As a guest on the (religious) island - that's how I keep seeing it - I also visit the church every week; in my case the Bethel Methodist Church. At church you are part of the local community and you also meet students from school and their parents there. When my wife and I decided to stay a bit longer after a contract period of three years (also at the request of the school) we were seen more and more as one of them: after all, it is relatively normal for teachers to leave after a contract period of three years. The comparison with a dovecote is regularly and easily made.

You should not simply and obviously infer from this that we have intensive contact with the local population. The Statian people are not so open, although the proverbial ice seems to have broken somewhat with some.

In any case, we keep reasonably far away from the (European) Dutch communities that easily form abroad. As Youp van 't Hek once remarked about winter sports enthusiasts and the alleged German misbehavior of this group, he found that quite a few of those Germans speak remarkably good Dutch. We recognize this behavior here as well. The generally subdued Statian has - just like us - some trouble with the somewhat boastful and pedantic tone in which the European Dutchman, shortly after his or her arrival on the island, states that he or she has seen the island and knows it. A modest attitude (as a guest of the island) does not seem very Dutch.

In my reflections I too sometimes have to search for the right tone. Of course I also see that there are things of which I think "that could be more efficient or better", but at the same time I have to admit to myself "but is the Statian approach really wrong?". The answer to this is not automatically affirmative. In short, I too see more than once that the pedantic Dutchman, without too much tact or consultation, may well have a point in a bureaucratic or administrative sense, but whether it is always worth making

that point in reality is a consideration that is subsequently not easily or obviously made. An example from my own practice: of course the IWB (interactive whiteboard) has many advantages in the classroom but when the electricity or internet fails on the island every now and then and support is not readily available in case of a breakdown, the classic blackboard and a piece of chalk are not such bad tools. So I swear by the robust simplicity of this material suitable for achieving an effective lesson.

It happened to me last night that I was in conversation with some local Statians about local issues. And my very interlocutors were wondering why Dutch law did not have a broader effect than just European Netherlands and why we have the US dollar as our currency here and not the Euro. I definitely recognize these questions: they could have been mine, but they were asked by local Statians! The conversation continued and the observation that the members of the Island Council, although elected locally, do not automatically stand up for the interests of all the islanders but base their actions partly on their 'own' agendas, was shared by me but I did not come up with it myself!

In my opinion, the Netherlands should be more open to a dialogue with the islanders whereby I would like to point out that also the representative islanders - namely those in the Island Council - should adopt a less introverted attitude and should seek contact with like-minded politicians or sister parties in the European Netherlands in order to put St. Eustatius on the map 'from within'.

As an extension of the conversation just mentioned, I would like to see, for example, that the legislation is 'cleaned up' once more. The Constitution (article 132a paragraph 4) indicates that 'own' laws and regulations are possible for the Public Entity "in view of special circumstances which make these public entities essentially different from the European part of the Netherlands". At this moment there are about six hundred (!) laws for the BES-area (or: Dutch Caribbean). Of the majority of them I ask myself "what would be the essentially different aspect here from the European Netherlands?". If, for example, the social legislation is not seen by you as essentially distinctive, it seems to me that we are easily getting closer to an unemployment benefit and an old age pension such as AOW (instead of the different - lesser - AOV). The whole discussion around the Caribbean social minimum even seems to me to have no *raison d'être* when all this is considered "Dutch".

Also, related to this, one should take a good look at why the US dollar is used. About fifty kilometers away - namely on French St. Maarten - there is also the Euro and the closest area with the US dollar as local currency is Puerto Rico. Introduction of the Euro will most likely also increase the availability of Dutch banks (under the supervision of the Dutch Central Bank) in the Dutch Caribbean. Apart from perhaps a 'switch-on phenomenon', I see more advantages than disadvantages of the introduction of the Euro in the Dutch Caribbean.

Can you, as the Kingdom Relations Commission, initiate such a reorganisation of laws as well as consider the introduction of the Euro? I am convinced that it would help the Caribbean Netherlands - while maintaining the necessary autonomy - to feel less excluded than is sometimes the case now.

I will conclude with three comments:

1. It goes without saying, as far as I am concerned, that the reorganisation of the legislation, as argued here, must take place in close consultation with the Island Council (as the representation of the population), otherwise it would be yet another example of Dutch pedantry. And I am here explicitly mentioning the Island Council and not in a broader sense the administration of the Public Entity. The feeling exists (on my side) that the government commissioners are too much on the leash of the State Secretary and that an independent (more) sound from or on behalf of the population will be nipped in the bud.
2. When the consequences of a legal 'alignment with the European Netherlands' are considered, the outcome "this is too expensive" could easily follow. It seems to me that a calculation should be made and not just an emotionally motivated finding. It cannot be that 0.15 percent of the Dutch population makes a significant and insurmountable difference in required finances. Moreover, discrimination can never be justified by a cost. Public transport in - for example - Eastern Groningen may need to be supplemented with money as well (oh yes, speaking of public transport: we should perhaps talk about air connections another time...).
3. In the background of all this there is the finding (not only mine!) that it suits some Dutch people - I am now thinking particularly of the investors and their political 'protectors' - that democracy has not yet returned to the island. Making decisions (whether or not with a permit) goes a lot easier without the hassle that democracy simply entails.

Thank you in advance for your thoughts.

Kind regards,

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