

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

The end of the coalition formation process is approaching and the filling of the posts seems to be a final step that will be filled next week. It is already clear that the State Secretariat for Kingdom Relations will be assigned to D66. What that will mean exactly remains to be seen, of course, but as I understand it, the Knops era is coming to an end. All kinds of things have happened in the period that is now behind us but whether we have also made a forward movement is, in my opinion, not self-evident. As far as that is concerned, I am pinning my hopes on the future.

Here and there I take note of glimpses that are cast ahead, with a view to giving substance to future policy. One of these visions involves a 'Caribbean province' with six Dutch municipalities in it, all without a Statute but 'simply' with the Dutch Constitution as the basis. In outline, this does not seem a bad vision to me, but I would like to make the following two comments:

1. A Caribbean province seems to me to have no added value: there is simply little in common. The islands are reasonably self-contained and nature gives this impression: between the six islands there is a lot of water and little exchange.
2. Defining six Dutch municipalities seems to me to be a bit too short-sighted. I think that six 'Public Entities' do more justice to the current and desired situation. I follow the idea that the 'Public Entity' according to the Constitution (article 132a) is defined as an administrative entity that resembles a Dutch municipality, but for which - per island - rules can be set and other specific measures can be taken in view of special circumstances that make these public entities substantially different from the European part of the Netherlands. This last point is important: not every (current) distinction is "essentially distinct from the European Netherlands" and it seems to me that those cases should also be neatly explained and agreed upon with the island government (including the Island Council).

This last addition is not unimportant, especially when I look at the current constellation on St. Eustatius where the Island Council actually participates in the (political) decision-making process 'for bacon and beans'. The government commissioner has an autocratic role and in fact this commissioner acts as a puppet in the hands of the State Secretary (in this case Knops). In the corridors it is said that democracy must return to the island government. In fact, the current governance of St. Eustatius has nothing, but then absolutely nothing, to do with democracy.

On the website of the island government (<https://statiagovernment.com>), a New Year's message from the government commissioner was published today that - naturally - sounds positive but only addresses external matters, mostly in a material sense. There is no question of involving the population - the core of democracy. Investors are given all the space they need to do their 'godly' thing; not a single obstacle is placed in their way. Not even when a permit is required for something.

Even restrictions because of the pandemic only apply to ordinary people, not to those with a very fat (investment) wallet.

The problem with this is that for decades the population has been used to playing a role as the fifth wheel on the wagon. In the period of the Netherlands Antilles it was also the larger islands (which now have the status of "country") that were allocated the budget after which the smaller islands were allowed to share out the remaining crumbs. If government has anything to do with protecting the weak, I am not sure I can find a good example of 'how it should be done' on this side of the ocean. Also, things that have become institutionalized such as an adequate minimum of existence for the Dutch Caribbean, AOV and 'onderstand' as well as the absence of unemployment benefits can only be found in the country 'the Netherlands' in the Caribbean part of it. And what is the essentially different aspect of this from the European Netherlands? I do not know! And don't bring up issues like differences in living standards, because elsewhere in the Netherlands these regional differences are not taken into account either. I have no choice but to conclude that the government for the Dutch Caribbean has deliberately strived for a 'second-class Netherlands'. And the discussion about it has - again deliberately - been postponed using the caretaker status of the government as an argument. Well, fortunately this last argument will soon no longer be valid!

I could mention here a laundry list of wishes and priorities but that would not be fair: those are my wishes and priorities. I would like to see the new State Secretary for Kingdom Relations organize a really equal and respectful communication between administrators, island council members and the population (of St. Eustatius). All this under a simultaneous "straightening out" of the lopsided situation I described above. Make that this island in terms of governance 'just' follows the Dutch laws and regulations with agreed exceptions which are related to the essentially European Netherlands distinction (of the Public Entity of St. Eustatius). And at the same time make the Euro the local currency so that (social) legislation can also be applied nationwide.

Let me, through the Committee Kingdom Relations, wish the Cabinet, and especially the new State Secretary for this domain, much wisdom, decisiveness and success.

Kind regards,

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W <http://statia.nu> (change the language with the flag in the upper right corner)