

The Hague, September 20, 2022.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations (of TK and of EK),

With regard to the domain of OCW, I have already made comments. The most striking there is of course the issue of the BSN (which the student in the European Netherlands, coming from the Dutch Caribbean, does not have as a matter of course, and about which there has already been some uproar - also by the National Ombudsman - but with no actual result to date). Also the diploma register seems to me to be an issue of which I believe that the Caribbean Dutch student does not naturally benefit from it, at least not to the same extent as the European Dutch student does. And that while that register for havo, vwo, etc. has existed for several years. In short, this last observation alone suggests that the Caribbean Dutch pupil/student does not matter in the Dutch context, or, if you will: is just hanging around.

Then there is another difference in this OCW domain, but of a completely different nature. And it is that of working conditions. I don't have to explain to you how terms of employment come about collectively: representatives of employees and of employers negotiate a collective labour agreement (CLA or - in Dutch - CAO). That is essentially the process. In the Caribbean Netherlands, this development has not yet taken off in a big way. There is, however, the realization that "something" must be, or must come. Meanwhile, there is the so-called "Personnel Manual for Education Personnel Dutch Caribbean" from 2019. This is a publication of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland and the responsibility for the content lies with the Ministry of OCW, Directorate FEZ, Department of Labor Affairs.

I am convinced that this handbook has been prepared with the best of intentions. After all, the consultation model between employees and employers and the organization of trade unions has not yet reached maturity in the Caribbean Netherlands (and more specifically: on the individual BES islands). But to then start making a handbook as a ministry with reference to laws that - it is no different so far - mostly have a BES character, seems to me a choice that can also be taken differently.

Teachers in the Caribbean Netherlands are second-class teachers. The "CN-CLA" involves more hours, less salary and worse working conditions. While there is a "fair" CLA for the European Netherlands (namely, based on negotiation), BES teachers have to settle for a very poor diktat (in the absence of negotiation results, there is the "handbook"). The educational goals to be achieved are the same, the money comes from the same pot and yet the elaboration is different for European and Caribbean Netherlands.

In almost all policy areas, including those of OCW, either the Dutch Caribbean does not matter or a specific BES sauce is applied to the policy. The latter also seems to be the case here now; in my opinion, it stems from the time of the 'country of the Netherlands Antilles', because a lot of laws and other books still date from that time when it comes to policy, laws and regulations on the BES islands in virtually all policy areas. That was then - in the run-up to the turnaround date of 10-10-10 - a conscious choice, but in my firm conviction one that would only slow down or even bring the developments on the BES islands in a broad sense to a standstill.

After all, the *inclusive* idea that characterizes (or: should characterize) the idea that the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands together form the country of the Netherlands does not come out well, if at all. Thus, there will always remain a European and a Caribbean Netherlands that just do not come together.

Intermezzo: For the record, I also see that declaring the European Dutch laws and regulations applicable in one fell swoop to daily life in the Caribbean Netherlands fuels colonial thoughts. That seems undesirable to me and much attention should therefore be paid to a careful information and implementation process. Of course I recognize feelings of islanders who would prefer to label their island as their own kingdom (with its own governance without outside interference) but then would like to see benefits and other financial income at a European Dutch level. Then I too say, it's one of two minds!

In my view: the dot on the horizon is/should be "all laws and regulations in the European Netherlands also apply in the Caribbean Netherlands, except for the specific laws and regulations (i.c. those for the public entity) of which the need arises from essentially different circumstances in the Caribbean compared to the European Netherlands". This is in line with the idea laid down in the Constitution. That dot on the horizon has been there since 10-10-10 and we are now twelve years on....

So also in education I prefer to see no handbook from the ministry or from RCN, but a learning process in which employers and employees come together in a collective bargaining agreement. And that in a Dutch context. So the education unions (*AOB and CNV Education are, as the two largest representatives of employees in education, cc: addressed of this letter*) also represent the personnel on the BES-islands and on the side of the employers the working domain is also: the whole of the Netherlands, thus including the Caribbean Netherlands (*this is also how I have cc: addressed the VO-raad*). And what then comes out as a CLA, applies to the whole of the Netherlands, both the European part and the Caribbean.

Here too there is a dot on the horizon in which a handbook may well have a place, as long as all parties realize that there is still a way to go. The goal then is a common CLA for the whole of the Netherlands!

We are now talking about the Education CLA but you can imagine that such a 'struggle' with thoughts and principles takes place in all policy areas. I therefore urge you - Kingdom Relations Committee - to convince other committees of this frame of mind. Only then can we say goodbye to the current practice in which first-class Dutchmen live in the European Netherlands and second-class Dutchmen in the Caribbean Netherlands.

Yours sincerely,

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cc: *National Ombudsman, Algemene Onderwijsbond (AOB), CNV Onderwijs, VO-raad*

Appendix: In-depth information on my (*present*) letter about the CLA in education