

The Hague, September 29, 2022.

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

My line of communication seems fairly consistent over the past few years. Perhaps even so that I occasionally repeat myself. At the same time I have the impression that my clout is not that great; I can only guess at the reason, but something tells me that it has to do with the fact that St. Eustatius (or more broadly: the Dutch Caribbean) has little impact in terms of electorate anyway. That actually makes it worse. After all, the government is also there for the weak or minorities in society. In that case, Stadians are - apparently - even less than - by way of example - mosquitoes. And didn't Mahatma Ghandi once say that you can measure the quality of a country's civilization by how it treats animals?

At the most recent meeting of the Island Council, a motion ¹ was passed to the effect that shortcomings, errors or delays in the process that have been or are being caused by the Dutch government and the representative on St. Eustatius (i.c., the government commissioner) should under no circumstances be passed on to the Island Council. Reading the explanation of the motion makes it (more than) clear that the Island Council is being manipulated (not to say blackmailed) by the Dutch government.

In addition to the argument in and around this motion, I call to mind the van Wijzen report, which underlies the intervention (in 2018) in the democracy of St. Eustatius. The offer letter of this report states, among other things, "*The commission also criticizes the Netherlands. It identifies a situation in which the Netherlands has stood aside for too long, both where the helping hand is concerned, and with regard to the debate about (more) autonomy. The committee also identifies an attitude in the Netherlands that is characterized by disinterest and the lack of a shared vision.*"

In all the criteria that would have to be met to return to full democracy - *according to the one-sided observation by the European Netherlands!* - lies only action for St. Eustatius (sometimes even a bit much, after all: why a local Court of Auditors? how many European Dutch cities have a Court of Auditors? so many municipalities do not, but they do have a "normal" municipal government...). And is there now a broad interest in the Caribbean Netherlands? And a shared vision? A vision is more of a 'dirty thing' for this cabinet than a framework from which to work; there have been enough jokes about that in the media so I won't do that here now. But, the average Dutchman (and I think also the average Member of Parliament) - if they exist - may know about the Caribbean islands in the Kingdom and may have been there on vacation, but hardly anyone knows and realizes that there are three small islands that are part of 'our' European Netherlands as a public body. Of that much I am convinced!

Furthermore, I read (even more recently) that VWS is coming up with a proposal ² to organize (youth) care in the Dutch Caribbean on an equal footing with that of the European Netherlands. Nota bene, the article states that it is not the intention that we adopt that one-on-one from the Netherlands. *Here is the crux as far as I am concerned.* The Constitution states in Article 1 that all Dutch people are

¹ <https://dossierkoninkrijksrelaties.nl/2022/09/28/eilandsraad-sint-eustatius-voelt-zich-gechanteerd-door-den-haag/>

² <https://bonaire.nu/2022/09/29/staatssecretaris-van-ooijen-zorg-en-jeugd-zorg-caribisch-nederland-gelijkwaardig-aan-europees-nederland/>

treated equally in equal cases; *not equal according to the circumstances*. So as far as I'm concerned, it is precisely the intention that it be adopted one-to-one, until it turns out that something cannot be done (for which we will then find a solution). Drenthe, Zeeland or Groningen is also "different" from Amsterdam or Rotterdam. Yet here one does not speak of an equivalent healthcare system. No, in the Netherlands all this is "equal" (not "equivalent"). In my view, this too is called institutional discrimination: the basis is laid (or: reinforced) here for the difference between first- and second-class Dutchmen (in the European and Caribbean Netherlands, respectively).

So with this proposal of minVWS we add yet another discriminatory 'thingy' to the set of discriminatory instruments. After all, the (reprehensible) discussion about the social minimum in the Caribbean Netherlands is still going on. If it is up to the current cabinet, this discussion will be kept going for a very - antisocial - long time because that only holds up the factual action and the cabinet then considers itself 'excused' from corrective action; I read in the newspaper these days similar opportunistic diving behavior of the cabinet when it comes to reinforcing homes in Groningen in relation to the danger of earthquakes from gas extraction.

I conclude this letter with one more point of difference, which is income tax. In my previous letter I mentioned the degree of income skewing. On St. Eustatius (and in the Caribbean Netherlands in a broader sense), the skewness in incomes (i.c. the gap between rich and poor) is about one and a half times greater than in the European Netherlands. This is mainly due to the low and non-progressive method of taxation. I will give you an example: I count myself about two to three times modal when it comes to my monthly income and net that results in about one thousand euros (per month) more when living on St. Eustatius than when (at the same gross income) tax is levied in the European Netherlands. You see: the wave of homebuyers on Bonaire is not just because of the glorious weather there! In my opinion, this inequality should be ended immediately! But yes, that could mean cutting into one's own flesh as well.... I say then: 'noblesse oblige'.

Finally - I ended a previous letter with this as well - a comment on laws and regulations in general. Fully in line with the Constitution - article 132a, paragraph 4 (about the public body) - own, island legislation and regulations can be established if circumstances on the island are essentially different from those in the European Netherlands. That requires consultation with the island's Island Council and not a club of lawyers in a European Dutch backroom putting together clever little phrases *without any consultation*. Serious, respectful consultation between equal discussion partners then more or less automatically leads to moral leadership, but at the moment we are still a long way from that situation....

Kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman, National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism.*