

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee (KOREL),

I have noted with interest the response of Secretary of State Knops to the questions you have been asked. In this letter I mainly focus on the aspect of "communication" (and in particular the communication with the Statian population). Your questions also address this point.

Whenever the letter mentions moments in which something is being communicated, it always concerns "information", by which the State Secretary therefore refers to a one-way traffic from the speaker to the public.

I experienced the intervention up close (which is not very difficult when you live here, by the way ;-)) and from the beginning I was surprised (and annoyed) that no question was ever asked. In the sense of "what does the Statian population think of it?". Such a question has - from the moment of intervention in February 2018 - really never been asked! Not to this day!

*Note: I regularly report to the House of Representatives and in doing so I place my findings - very transparently - on a website that I consider to be my "workplace". If you wish, you can read about my findings yourself: <http://www.statia.nu> (with both an English and a Dutch part).*

For about two and a half years now there has been talk ABOUT Statians and never even WITH Statians. Of course there is the Social Advisory Board, but that is a figment of the imagination behind which consultation is faked. These people have been 'handpicked' to take their seats, at least they haven't been elected by the Statian people. I don't know what criteria were used in this search process, but I don't exclude that expectations of "compliance" and "uncriticism" played a major role. Issues raised by this Board are not put on the agenda as a matter of course; only issues that the government commissioner wishes to put on the agenda are mentioned, and open discussion does not take place. Until recently, minutes were either late or not distributed and then only to the members of the Board; the ordinary Statian does not yet know what is being discussed and cannot find out via website or Facebook. So when the State Secretary tells you that the Social Advisory Board has been consulted, it is not an obvious lie, but it is certainly misleading because there is no question of an actual consultation.

The twelve conditions that must be met? You only find them in documents from the Government to the House of Representatives; in the flow of information (in so far as it already exists) from the local government in the direction of the Statian population there is not a word about them. I sometimes say that there may have been "administrative neglect", but that we have come from that situation "from the rain to the drip".

In the most recent information (24 June last), a video was shown by Mr. Frits Goedgedrag (former governor of the Netherlands Antilles, currently a member of the Council of State in special service). He indicated that democracy as it currently exists in the European Netherlands is the result of a development that has lasted several centuries. To expect against that background "miracles" in a few years or even decades is of course unrealistic.

I would like to draw your attention to page 41 of (the English version of) the report of the Commission of Wise Men ([https://www.jhtm.nl/eux/bibliotheek/commissie\\_van\\_wijzen/rapport\\_EN.pdf](https://www.jhtm.nl/eux/bibliotheek/commissie_van_wijzen/rapport_EN.pdf)), and in particular to the paragraph starting with 'In hindsight it must be concluded...' and the two paragraphs that follow. I also warmly recommend that you read Chapter 6 ("Recommendations") again. The Commission of Wise Men points out here several times the feelings of paternalism and disappointment that are present on St. Eustatius, resulting from the actions of the Netherlands (e.g. in the evaluation by the Commission 'Spies' of the laws WoIBES and FinBES).

Where the Commission of Wise Men adds many nuances to their experiences on the island, they nevertheless recommend an intervention as it has now taken place. At the same time, according to the Commission of Wise Men, there would also be a number of shortcomings in the way in which the Netherlands deals with the Public Entities (and therefore also with St. Eustatius). There is a lack of a shared vision on how to deal with the islands, as well as a shared management philosophy, according to the Commission of Wise Men.

If I compare these findings with the fact that hardly any consultation has taken place with the people of Statia, in terms of a "broad social discussion" about "*how to proceed now*" or "*what do we think Statia should look like in ten years time, what are spearheads or points on the proverbial horizon, and what should we do to achieve that*" then the concept of "patronage" gets, as far as I am concerned, another extra and painful charge <sup>1</sup>.

At the bottom of page 3 (note: all pages are numbered as "5") of the reaction of State Secretary Knops it can be read that a discussion about the role of the Kingdom Representative should not take place now. He calls it "undesirable". *Of course it is not at all*. If you are going to install a form of "democracy 2.0" anyway, then immediately tackle the accompanying preconditions. If one thing is clear, it is that the intervention of the Netherlands has so far yielded very little (in terms of improving governance) and that the Statian population has again experienced the past two and a half years as patronising and

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<sup>1</sup> Consultation WITH the people of Statia will, in my firm belief and expectation, certainly in the beginning, be difficult. After all, nobody is used to that. Much will be about "*take my case now...*" instead of about common concerns, interests and ideas. Here, too, a learning process will have to be gone through. And that takes time. It is undoubtedly this (time) aspect that leads the Secretary of State - impatient as he is - to prefer to skip this phase of maturing. He prefers to *realize* things instead of making sure that from now on, *Statian will* (in their own way and at their own pace) *realize the right things*.

disappointing. ***Seen in that light, it would therefore be an important 'statement' if precisely the passages about the Kingdom Representative were to be deleted in the present bill (after all, they do not add anything to the set phasing). Your intervention on this bill will give the Statian population the idea that at least part of The Hague - you, the Senate - cares about the feelings of patronage of the population!***

When the State Secretary subsequently has to go through the legislative proposal again, in my opinion there will still be plenty of time to take steps to restore control of St. Eustatius. After all, in January/February 2018 it could all go very quickly! After all, going through with the elections is an important matter!

I would like to conclude with a small example of how a certain choice of words can put people on the wrong track. On page 3 of the Secretary of State's response I read that the Windward Islands are in the process of setting up a ferry connection, and that the ministries of The Hague will provide support if necessary. I will not speak for Saba or St. Maarten but on St. Eustatius this sound has never been heard, other than with the progress report of State Secretary Knops to the House of Representatives (May 29th last). In reality it seems to me that something is going on here that was invented in The Hague and is now being "injected" locally. With whom and in which consultations this has been discussed is not known to me, but on the island of St. Eustatius this initiative is certainly not widely known. And whether it is really appreciated is in my opinion only the question. At least as important as a good connection with St. Maarten it is found to have good, direct and affordable air connections, independent of St. Maarten <sup>2</sup>, between the three Public Entities (Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius). A hopeful report about this - 'Connectivity Caribbean part of the Kingdom' - has been untouched in The Hague for two years now.

I wish you a lot of wisdom.

Kind regards,

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<sup>2</sup> With Hurricane Irma in 2017, this dependence was found to be too, or at least very high. Supply of shops as well as internet connections on St. Eustatius were negatively affected as a result of a lot of damage on St. Maarten. As time went on this argument became less and less important and fell into the background. At this moment the dependency on St. Maarten is again very high, just like before. *Until the next hurricane...* I'm sure this argument will be given priority *for a while...*