

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

It's summer. Cucumber time. Quiet on the island. If only because you can't get off the island or get on it easily. In that respect, the policies of both Winair and the local government are a bit obscure. Or, if you like, non-transparent. With reference to each other, nothing happens. Winair doesn't fly because the Public Entity doesn't give permission. And the Public Entity believes that within the BES, traffic can simply take place, but notes that Winair does not make any flights available.

Whether the Public Entity is completely honest here, I wonder, because even with the boat you cannot sail to Saba just like that, for that the diving school in any case does not get permission or an exemption from a prohibition on... *well, on what actually?* Diving schools on Saba, St. Eustatius and Bonaire came up with an exchange program because within the 'BES-bubble' movement of people would simply be possible and it would probably be a nice thought and cooperation if divers from one island would be on the other island for a few days to make dives. But if you really want to organize that, then there are all kinds of objections.

In short, the talk is full of employment until you, as an entrepreneur, really want to give it a creative interpretation, then the local government will not give up. In fact, you would expect help to turn this creative idea into reality, but none of that. Borders, at least those of St. Eustatius, remain hermetically closed.

Note: A few days ago, in the context of the local elections next autumn, two speakers were present in Lions Den: Chris Johnson of Saba (now living and working on Sint Maarten) and Nina den Heyer of Bonaire: just fly in and fly out again one or two days later. No quarantine? No, apparently not. Something about Orwell and pigs: are they all equal now or are there some that are more equal than others? You don't know. As with everything (since February 2018!): transparency is completely absent.

Speaking of elections. In the European Netherlands too, elections are playing an increasingly emphatic role. In that context, we followed how the CDA has chosen a new list leader. It appears to have become Hugo de Jonge. File hunter pur sang, Pieter Omtzigt, who has commanded a great deal of respect by bringing the Tax and Customs Administration to its knees in the benefits affair, has come in second (*and will not be*). Curious to see how this will continue.

From the point of view of the resident of St. Eustatius (but also that of the other Caribbean islands in the kingdom) it is important how the different parties look at this part of the kingdom, or more specifically: at the Caribbean Netherlands.

It seems to me that friend and foe will agree that none of the islands in the Caribbean part of the kingdom will be able to be an independent country outside the kingdom. For that - in general - the economy per island is too weak and not diverse enough. An independent existence within the

kingdom, such as Curacao, Aruba and St. Maarten, does not seem to be an undivided success either: too much unrest, too easy to hold on to the comfortable plush while the population does not share equally in the lusts of a few (but in the burdens of all) ¹.

Sounds like "*make of all six islands a municipality and together a province and insert them in their entirety, in the Dutch kingdom*" I too sometimes hear. Although I seem to understand the idea behind it, it doesn't seem to me to be a structure with a future, for two reasons. Firstly, the islands have little in common and secondly, there will be a hierarchy with a main island and ancillary islands. Such a hierarchy does not do justice to the pride, feelings and culture per island (that's what the past decades have taught us).

In my opinion, the construction that does most justice to the pride, feelings and culture mentioned above, on the one hand, and in which the islanders optimally share in the richness of the European Netherlands, on the other hand, is that of the public entity. A construction that already exists and - by definition - is very flexible. For each island, in consultation with the islanders involved, the European Netherlands (legally) agrees which part of the public administration will be taken care of by the European Netherlands (there is already a broad consensus about, for example, Defence: let the European Netherlands take care of this!) and which part will be taken care of by the island itself. In this way, the Statute has in fact become superfluous and you will maximally meet what can be done autonomously. All this under the safe Dutch umbrella with a Kingdom Constitution.

Note: In the Dutch Caribbean I see (and experience) that income tax is a matter for the BES-islands. Not bad in itself, but the Dutch Caribbean already has a Gini factor that is about 30% higher than that of the European Netherlands (and therefore has a proportionally more skewed income distribution) while it charges a 'flat fee' for almost all incomes, instead of a progressive levy that allows the strongest shoulders to bear the heaviest burden. An incomprehensible combination for me.

Also for the three BES-islands this situation (i.e. with in principle equal legislation subject to justified exceptions) has so far only been partially filled in. To begin with, the Civil Code in the Dutch Caribbean is not the same as in the European Netherlands, but there are more smaller and larger, but in any case incomprehensible and non-justicial differences. Things will probably have to be adjusted but in my opinion at least *only in this construction mentioned by me (i.e. six islands, six public bodies)* do you really do justice to all!

Important in all this is that a really open consultation takes place. Also on the island on which I live (St. Eustatius) there is no open and free discussion about the future of the island or about the constitutional relation with the European Netherlands (*not for a long time and the administrative*

¹ In all honesty it should be noted that in the European Netherlands too it has taken some time (a few centuries) for democracy to come into being, as it is now. In short, you could say here that the islands are in a learning process...

intervention of February 2018 has not improved this at all). I would therefore like to say, before taking any steps in this (kingdom)domain: start with a truly open discussion per island!

When I get acquainted with the visions of 'kingdom relations', 'Caribbean part of the kingdom' or 'Caribbean Netherlands' via the website of the various political parties, I notice the following, among other things:

- A Commonwealth with the Caribbean countries of the kingdom. This means a cooperation with independent and sovereign states. A little empathic approach that is closest to '*just renounce it*', which - fortunately - is an impossibility under the current circumstances (given our relationship with the United Nations).
- Pretty words like "ensuring the integrity of governance and of good law enforcement and border control, strengthening the coastguard, improving the economic perspective, e.g. by reducing poverty and improving infrastructure, on condition of good governance and sound financial accountability". How we are going to achieve all this remains uncertain: in any case, I do not see an open discussion about the future on the basis of equality as a direct result of it.
- Matters that are really true where are also mentioned. Indeed, we (in the European Netherlands) still talk too much *about* and not *with* the inhabitants of the islands and in the European Netherlands there is a lack of trust in the Caribbean fellow Dutchman.
- Because of the special relationship with the Netherlands, the Caribbean islands are eligible for European funds and EU-wide cooperation agreements such as the Erasmus+ programme. In fact true, but I do not see it being realised easily in concrete projects for the islands; I am now thinking, for example, of the European Union's PSO programme in relation to public (air) transport between the BES islands.

In conclusion, I would like to give you two things:

- talk (and let the government talk) *with* and not just *about* the islands and their inhabitants;
- before the elections in the European Netherlands, include the Caribbean matter in a constructive way in your party programme; the [text marked blue](#) above could, in my opinion, be a good start.

Enjoy your recess!

Kind regards,

J.H.T. (Jan) Meijer MSc MBA,
Bellevue Road 4, Upper Round Hill,
St. Eustatius, Dutch Caribbean.