

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

A lot hasn't changed compared to last time, but that's also because it's holiday time. Students from the island who study elsewhere - for example in the European Netherlands - visit the parental home again and vice versa people from the island go on holiday (again: for example to the European Netherlands).

The big, important difference with similar activities a year earlier is of course the worldwide pandemic that is currently being fought all over the world with restrictions in everything, in anticipation of and in anticipation of the arrival of a vaccine with which life can possibly be 'reset' again.

In high school, exams are now being held - in the holiday period: July and August - which have been postponed by CXC from May/June to July/August. And so, on Monday 3 August 2020, the school will say goodbye to its fifth-year students who have just completed the CSEC exam (comparable to VMBO/HAVO level in the European Netherlands; I would have liked it to be a bit more precise, but the CXC Decision is not yet ready *five years after the introduction of the programme (!)*). The Ministry of OCW mentions 'corona' as the cause of this delay, but of course that only sounds like a valid excuse for the past six months; the four and a half years prior to that, the Ministry of OCW simply paid too little or no attention to it). Caribbean Netherlands (or: St. Eustatius) is just a bit far from The Hague.

Prior to this, I already mentioned the holiday period which - for some on the island - means that family visits are made on both sides of the Atlantic in the context of family reunification. Halfway through the holiday, with the "*Adjusted Travel and Quarantine policy of Statia per 17th of July*", it is stated - *just like that, in my opinion* - that if you have to be quarantined for fourteen days on your return to St. Eustatius, the costs of this must be reimbursed by the returning traveller (or his or her employer). This is a cost item of approximately 2300 US dollars per person (or approximately 2000 Euro per person).

You will only have gone on holiday at the beginning of July and will return in August (without the possibility of home or self quarantine): just look at a hefty extra cost item (previously borne by the government <sup>1</sup>)! Whether this is a carefully considered implementation of regulations, I wonder. Such an extra cost item is high, even by European Dutch standards and especially in this environment where incomes are already on average an order of magnitude lower than in the European Netherlands. If you want to question this point, you'll soon be told "then you're just not going on holiday", which of course is true, but my earlier interpretation of this island - Saint Alcatraz - suddenly takes on a somewhat sad and grim meaning. What's more, such a remark is doubly sour for people who have spared for a long time to go to - for example - the European Netherlands and are then hit hard financially with this measure.

---

<sup>1</sup> It would almost provoke civil disobedience. After all, if you do not comply with the measures, you are (perhaps?) punishable and you run the risk of being taken into custody. In that case, you will suddenly be quarantined, but without additional costs. I assume for a moment that the costs of detention will still be borne by the government.

In February of this year, the current government commissioner and his deputy went to work. In their introductory talk on 18 February in Lions Den, communication and transparency were highly valued. Well, those words still hang there - in a proverbial sense - while there has been no change at all in that respect. Of course there is the periodical COVID information on the radio but the future of the island and the relationship between the island and the European Netherlands is the subject of the broad social discussion but not the ground. There is simply no communication. The fact that the Temporary Neglect of Work Act has been repealed with effect from 8 July 2020 and replaced by the St. Eustatius Restoration Facilities Act is also something that hardly receives any attention in public life. The most involved reaction you can elicit here barely rises above the level of "*Ah, I guess...*" with the underlying idea "*What I (Statian) think about something doesn't matter at all in the discussion...*".

In the context of COVID19 and quarantine, the status of "essential worker" has arisen. This is a concept that everyone has an idea of, but it is difficult to give an exact definition of. It comes down to the fact that you are an "essential worker" when the government commissioner thinks so. And now I am absolutely not against the progress on the island, but this "essential worker" can simply work in his "very important project", in which case special "protocols" apply. In essence, it will come down to allowing you to work but not getting too close to your colleagues. With everything I find out through the media about the nature of the virus as well as about the effectiveness of the protective measures, I cannot really take this measure seriously; it seems to be inspired by almost American sounding initiatives such as "economy goes for (people's) health". Which projects am I talking about, for example? About the renovation of the airport (nothing really goes wrong in life on St. Eustatius when that project is delayed due to stricter enforcement of quarantine measures) and about the development of the Golden Rock Resort, a hotel complex of which even the ordinary citizen is unable to see permits. It remains unclear what is so 'essential' about the workers on these projects, not least because there are no or hardly any recruitment advertisements: where do the people come from and what very special capacities are we talking about here? Here, too, there is only the transparency of frosted glass.

I notice that my tone has become more cynical over time. And that while living and working on this island is usually very sunny and pleasant. I regret that somewhat but I hardly see (other) critical sounds that transcend the (gossip) level of Facebook. I also think I see that, now that no other parties have come forward for the local elections, the central government also sees that life before and after the intervention will ultimately not differ that much. It is my estimation that the Secretary of State will be happy when he will be able to close this file without too much loss of face; with which another bead of disappointment can be added to the already (centuries-long) chain of such beads on the island.

I conclude by quoting from the report "*Nearness or distance, a world of difference*" with the subtitle (in the Dutch version of the report) "*St. Eustatius, always been a stepchild*" of the Commission of Wise Men from January 2018 (with which this chapter on the European Dutch intervention in Statian history started). On page 53 it reads: "*As former administrators, we believe that it is important that there is a connection between good governance and farther-reaching autonomy. We find it equally important*

*that a joint striving for more autonomy should be the starting point. That the Netherlands must support and supervise the progress over this path is a must as far as we are concerned. It is a challenging and complex path, certainly for an island with a small community and a vulnerable economy. There are no simple solutions for this. Even providing support and supervision is not a simple task, because not all Statian politicians value help and assistance. The autonomy debate must not only be held with politicians, but also with the population, of which a large part has a historical connection with the Netherlands. Should there be referenda, the population must be able to evaluate all aspects on the basis of their own knowledge and information".* And what is actually happening? Nothing of a debate. Various advisors fly in and out and record all kinds of findings (about ZVK, about the airport, about the roads, about...), but there is no discussion with the population at all; not even a weak attempt to do so.

My question to you is "how long will you remain a spectator of this process before your disappointment tolerance is also affected?" And "haven't you noticed that the Council of State is so much more realistic than the Secretary of State for Kingdom Relations?"

I wish you a pleasant continuation of your recess, as well as much wisdom in the discussions in the parliamentary year ahead.

Yours sincerely,

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

Question: *I would like to ask you a question. Just call it ignorance on my part. In the Constitution I think the Public Body is defined as a flexible entity that gets the right to exist 'by law'. In this way WolBES gives substance to the way in which the administration on the Public Entity on the BES-islands takes shape. But where do I find (by law) the demarcation between the policy areas for which the European Netherlands is responsible (e.g. Defence and Education) on the one hand and the Public Entity St. Eustatius (e.g. maintenance of school buildings) on the other hand? For the time being I know that this is the case and those who have been working on this island for much longer confirm the existence of such a demarcation, but I can't find a formalized reflection of the agreements made in the law.*