

St. Eustatius, September 18, 2021.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee, Dear National Ombudsman,

As a result of what has become public knowledge about the actions of State Secretary Knops (after apparently attempts were made to keep it away from there, or to massage it in advance), it may be that someone is wondering, "*what must they think of that in St. Eustatius?*".

Well, I do not pretend to speak for all Stadians but I am sure that I am not alone in the opinion I express here. Of course, the group of "vassals" of Mr. Knops will not recognize themselves in this, but when I say that I am not alone, I am talking about the "real" Stadians and not about those who have come in through the actions of the Secretary of State and also not about those who, from an investment point of view, think they have to exploit the island in the sense that they - the investors - will benefit at the expense of the island and its inhabitants. The big investors were attracted at the time by influential people, whether or not by chance (almost) all members of the same political party as the State Secretary and the former government commissioner.

That party is called CDA and has a Christian foundation. You would think that this party has a lot of sympathy for the weaker members of society, but the Benefits affair, and more recently the refugee debacle with the withdrawal from Afghanistan, has made a lot clear. Of course, it's all very well put together: a law that in February 2018 will result in democracy on the island being rendered inoperative. A real law, which - admittedly - came about democratically but where the arguments should perhaps have been given a little more discussion and depth.

But no, our Sun King - State Secretary Knops - is pushing his own way through and so it happened. In recent years - I have noted it more often than not, without paying much attention - the work has been mainly on infrastructure and administrations and little (read: nothing) on "democracy". No consultation with the population on issues such as "*what should Statia look like in five or ten years*" and "*how do we get there*". These kinds of questions, if they were discussed at all, were investigated and provided with a solution in The Hague, based in part on visits by smart people from The Hague to the beautiful island, during which the aspect of "*consultation with the population*" was carefully left off the agenda.

Unilaterally, a set of requirements were met before there would be a chance to return to democracy. Nothing, but really nothing, goes in terms of real consultation. It is all a diktat from The Hague. Perhaps the initial objectives were not really wrong, but in the elaboration it turned out that instead of a democracy, a dictatorship was set up. And that with a population that for a long time had not been used to having a say and instead had to wait for what the 'Master' had in mind.

For the record, I do not have all the wisdom either, so if you ask me how to get out of this I do not have a ready-made recipe. What I do know is that such a recipe must include a lot of consultation, mutual respect and a position of equivalence. The current example from the distant Netherlands does

not bode well in the short term. The Secretary of State, who is responsible for our good governance, wanted to make a profit from a land purchase in his own area - so we read in the press.

Here on Statia, if an employee uses the boss' car without permission when doing odd jobs for himself, it will probably lead to dismissal, or at least a reprimand. If you are above the law, this example teaches us, other standards apply - apparently. If the private affairs of the Secretary of State really had nothing to hide, then there would be no need for MinBZK officials to do any legal and communicative cutting and pasting and to ask the State's Attorney for assistance, would there?

And if that should be the case, then of course at one's own expense, like all other Dutch citizens.

May I ask you, both the Commission for Kingdom Relations and the National Ombudsman, to do everything in your power (possibly with the involvement of the Council of State) to return democracy to the island of St. Eustatius soon. Until now we have only moved further away from the situation in which, with mutual respect and on the basis of equality, the broad social consultation is entered into (between the European Dutchman and the Statian people, on all matters of public interest). There is still a lot to learn on both sides of the Atlantic.

Kind regards,

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Afterword: To illustrate what is happening here, the following is provided (I do not intend to give an exhaustive overview). We have here the intra-island air connections that through deliberate Dutch actions (with only Winair and its shareholders in mind) are flawed, unreliable and outrageously expensive. We see the "development" of Golden Rock Resort by investor Barnhoorn where a kind of Saint Barths is realized for the benefit of the very rich at the expense of nature and people. The lack of timely availability of permits is something that is easily turned a blind eye to with the power of money, and of course workers in that project are exempt from strict pandemic-related obligations (with "essential worker" status) without exception.

That Stadians live as second-class Dutchmen (no BSN, no banking facilities comparable to the European Netherlands such as a mortgage at competitive interest rates, lead times of postal services of weeks if not months, substandard social services including the lack of unemployment benefits, etc.) is something that the average executive usually does not care about or fights for. The executive him- or herself is doing well, and that is pretty much the measure of things. For the record, the sun shines often and the people are friendly. The feeling that they are being treated below par is not new and people seem to have resigned themselves - after centuries. *Isn't it true that a good and caring government is precisely concerned about the weakest in society?*