

St. Eustatius, November 16, 2021.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

By way of introduction, I would like to note that on St. Eustatius we have now gone from a *workable neglect* to a *complete neglect*. Of course, in administrative and communication terms, things were not going very great before February 2018, but you would almost want to think back nostalgically to that time when we see how things are going now. Pretty much no news on any front while all sorts of things are going on. Some examples:

Through the website of [statiagovernment.com](http://statiagovernment.com) we see as "news" that on November 4, the preparation of the ferry is in full swing (per November 1, the ferry would start!). Meanwhile we read on media such as [BES-reporter.com](http://BES-reporter.com) and [DossierKoninkrijksrelaties.nl](http://DossierKoninkrijksrelaties.nl) that Saba is very concerned about this and that the cause may lie in poorly coordinated cooperation between ministries responsible for customs and the military police. Apparently it does not occur to the Statian government to inform the population about this. And then Ms. De Vries (VVD) asked Parliamentary questions to as many as four ministries about this ferry connection in connection with Customs and the Military Police. Even the government commissioner admitted in the meeting of the Island Council that the ferry mainly serves incoming tourism (mainly from St. Maarten). So it is not about the Statian population at all. The Island Council also insists on improved and affordable air connections. *Where were the concerned Members of Parliament when the air connections to Bonaire and Sint Maarten (CN Express) were taken out of service?*

Another example concerns the 10 percent increase in the minimum wage. This demand had been on the table for some time in Bonaire and Saba. St. Eustatius felt some pressure, ignoring a Central Dialogue report and following the course of Bonaire and Saba. It will be like this. Apparently it is worth mentioning on the government news site on October 21 that the government commissioner sent a letter about this. That in the meantime a motion on this has been filed in the House of Representatives, which has also been voted on by now: the Government Commissioners apparently do not consider it important enough to inform the Statian people about this.

Meanwhile, the Government Commissioner has visited The Hague. At least, so it is heard. With what message did she go there? Of course it does not concern me personally but it seems appropriate and respectful to the people of Statia to learn what goals the Commissioner of Government intends to pursue in The Hague. Not a word is heard about this.

And, to conclude this series of examples, in the meeting of the Kingdom Relations Committee on November 10, 2021, I see on the agenda that the Island Council of St. Eustatius will visit the European Netherlands and want to have a conversation with members of the Commission. Excellent of course. But this is the first time I have heard of it on the

agenda. Nobody on the island has heard anything about it. I should note, by the way, that it is of course possible that some publicity has been given to this on Facebook pages or radio broadcasts of the political parties. One could say, just as in the previous paragraph it concerns the government commissioner, that the people of Statia, on whose behalf the Island Council acts, would like to know on which points they will be consulted in the European Netherlands and with which officials or organizations. As a side note: in order to mail the Island Council members you must have their personal addresses because their addresses mentioned on the website of the Public Entity appear to have been unusable for some time.

These are just examples. It outlines a framework which shows a great disinterest, at least when it comes to informing the Statian people by their own local government. One could argue that the people of Statia have not been in a position to have a say in (their own) future for a long time and are therefore not at all used to standing up for themselves. And that their skill in doing so is thus also little developed. That may be a correct consequence but it does not seem to me a reason to leave the Statian population in the proverbial 'dark'. It seems to me that the government should do everything in its power to involve the population as much as possible in developments and then, of course, especially at the stage where there is still some room for improvement.

Anyway, that does not seem to be the case. In my letter of October 14, I have already formulated the hypothesis that the investments surrounding Mr. Barnhoorn's 'Golden Rock resort' project must go ahead without a hitch. No stone is laid in his way. Even the construction of a path from 'his' resort to the sea (through a nature reserve managed by Stenapa) is tolerated without a permit. And where ordinary mortals sometimes have to deal with coronation measures, this is not the case for Mr. Barnhoorn. Keeping a distance and wearing mouth caps shortly after arriving on the island are things for ordinary people, not for rich investors. After all, everything seems to be for sale for money. Whether the virus and the public health that is threatened by it also think so: so far so good, but why would you want to run this risk? Mr. Barnhoorn, in any case, does not care about this kind of restrictive measures and thus shows his disrespect for the (health of the) Statian population.

Let me elaborate on this development. Suppose now that the government commissioner, supported (or even: stimulated) by the secretary of state (or rather: the national government) wants to go ahead with building hotels, houses, etc. With the main purpose of attracting wealthy investors and developing tourism along these lines. *Is that also the wish of the population?*

I can imagine that initially the response will be positive but with St. Barths and Bonaire as a "foreland" I am not so enthusiastic for the longer term. The gap between rich and poor will be widened (*and it is already wider here than in the European Netherlands!*). And if the population were to support it en

masse, then there would be something to be said for it, but it is not being talked about at all and the other side of the coin (i.c. the widening of the gap between rich and poor that I predicted) remains completely out of the picture. I would recommend the book 'Grand Hotel Europa' by Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer to anyone struggling with this issue. It is impossible to summarize the book in a single sentence, but the oneliner "tourism destroys where it is attracted" comes close.

My consideration - and therefore advice to all who are concerned - is therefore "*cherish the village character of the island and leave it as untouched as possible*". In my opinion there is room for some development of tourism, but then focus on the unique character of St. Eustatius (i.e. the history and the relationship with both the Netherlands and the United States) and cherish the black sand of the volcano: all unique selling points of the island and do not try to imitate the white beaches of - for example - Barbados. In any case: come up with a real, serious and multi-year plan, instead of muddling along while everyone is kept ignorant. And when developing that plan, consider other pillars, such as regional education or regional agriculture and livestock.

Furthermore, a not insignificant point of attention concerns the connectivity between the BES islands. And here I am referring, of course, to connectivity by air, and including Bonaire. The ferry service that is now about to start is being "pushed through" as a prestige project of the investors (and of the State Secretary/Government). It is abundantly clear and also so argued by the government commissioner in a recent meeting of the Island Council, that the ferry primarily supports tourism from St. Maarten to St. Eustatius (and Saba). For the Statian this ferry connection does not mean that much and also the Island Council prefers to see an improvement in frequency and affordability of the direct air connections in the BES area (thus including Bonaire). Competition from Winair should be encouraged so that these competitors can also offer their services. But the State Secretary and the Minister of I&W are for the time being keeping blind and deaf to these findings and continue to pamper Winair. St. Maarten is a country in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and is 'actually' further away from the Statian than the European Netherlands!

Incidentally, with regard to the ferry, some fuss is now being made of the not-scheduled customs and military police. With the entry from St Kitts I can imagine something, but between St Eustatius and Saba not so much. The governor of Saba already made the comparison with a trip between two Wadden Islands where neither customs nor the military police play a role. In short, there seems to be double standards.

In my previous letter I argued that paragraph 4 of article 132a of the Constitution in principle gives room for specific, island laws and regulations but is apparently (also) used to maintain or even

increase existing differences, instead of bringing the two Netherlands closer together. I plead for a working group that will hold the existing approx. 600 laws that apply specifically to the BES area against the light and consider whether the NL equivalent does not also simply suffice so that the unnecessary extra legislation can be eliminated. The motivation for the justifiably existing laws in the BES area should be more sharply defined. This motivation - i.e. where is the boundary? - in my opinion, the Council of State should be asked for advice.

I would like to conclude with a summary of what has been elaborated above. The future scenario for St. Eustatius should look like this (if the population of St. Eustatius is to benefit optimally):

- Commit to as little legislation and regulation specific to the BES area as possible (especially in the social domain, there seems to be much to gain for the Statian if NL laws and regulations are declared more integrally applicable).
- Think about a serious, widely supported plan for the future of Statia and do not allow unbridled investors to continue on their own and self-chosen path undisturbed (i.e. without a permit or without an orderly and targeted zoning plan). I am convinced that this will only increase the divide between rich and poor and that the investors will ultimately walk away with the main prize without the population being much the wiser.
- Appeal to the government commissioner: communicate, communicate and communicate (and of course at the stage where input from the population still makes sense). For the time being it seems that the government commissioner (supported, I believe, even encouraged by the State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations) sees more salvation in a closed communication bastion from which no dialogue whatsoever will emerge.

Kind regards,

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