

Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en
Koninkrijksrelaties

> Return Address P.O. Box 20011 2500 EA The Hague

To the President of the Senate of the State General
P.O. Box 20017
2500 EA THE HAGUE

**Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations**

Turfmarkt 147
The Hague
P.O. Box 20011
2500 EA The Hague

Reference
2022-0000341948

Your reference

Attachment(s)
3

Date 29 juni 2022
Re 9de Voortgangsrapportage over de bestuurlijke ingreep Sint
Eustatius

Introduction

I want to use this letter to inform your senate of the progress of the projects on St. Eustatius and the progress based on the St. Eustatius Act on the Restoration of the Provisions. I will also inform you about the results of the mediation process between the government commissioner and the island council and the intended timeline for the return to democracy.

When I took office, I already indicated how important I think it is to work together with the islands on the tasks in the Caribbean part of our Kingdom. For me, this includes regular administrative consultations and also holding discussions with residents. In February of this year, I made a first introductory trip and recently I was able to visit the BES islands, including St. Eustatius, a second time. I experience it as an added value to meet each other on site and to have a conversation with each other. I therefore intend to visit the islands regularly to strengthen the relationship between the islands and The Hague.

During my visit, I spoke with several people about the opportunities they see to move the island forward and about the concerns they have. For example, I took a walk through the nature of Saint Eustatius together with *Sint Eustatius National Parks Foundation* (Stenapa). Here I was confronted with the disastrous effect of the stray cattle on the nature of the island. In the town hall meeting, I also discussed this subject with the inhabitants of the island, together with the government commissioner. We have indicated that we want to take steps to reduce the goat population to an acceptable level. My colleague, Minister De Jonge of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VRO), was also present at the town hall meeting. He has spoken with residents about the need to build houses to improve the housing market.

A special meeting was the conversation with volunteers who are committed to the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural inheritance on St. Eustatius. They

do this by keeping cultural practices, such as dance, alive and by making artefacts from archaeological excavations accessible to the public.

Of course, during my visit I also spoke about the return to democracy. I have seen that the mediation process has greatly improved the relationship between the government commissioner and the island council. I have had good discussions with them about the steps towards a return to normal administrative relations.

The main purpose of this trip was to sign the *Agreement 2022-2023*, which I signed together with the government commissioner and in the presence of the island council members. This is an important event that I will discuss in more detail later in this report.

The mediation process

Mutual trust and reciprocity is important when we work together within the Kingdom. This point has my particular attention when it comes to St. Eustatius. The duration of the administrative intervention affects the relationship between the government commissioner and the island council. In December 2021, the government commissioner and the island council therefore decided to start a mediation process. This process was completed in May 2022 and was supervised by Ms Suzy Camelia-Römer (lawyer and former Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles) and Maria Liberia-Peters (also former Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles).

I can inform you that the mediation process has been successfully completed and that agreements have been reached on reaching phase 2.0 and 2.1 of the Act on the Restoration of the Provisions for St. Eustatius. No agreement was reached on phase 2.2 during the mediation, but a follow-up appointment was made during my last visit to the island. An external party will perform an assessment on the basis of which it can be determined when phase 2.2 can start.

During the mediation process, the government commissioner and the island council worked on the joint elaboration of 3 subjects:

- Rules of Procedure

The island council and the government commissioner have analysed the Rules of Procedure. It emerged from this that there are contradictions between the roles as established in the Rules of Procedure and the situation that currently exists under the Act on the Restoration of the Provisions. The (deputy) government commissioners and the island council members are currently in consultation about the way in which the Rules of Procedure can be adjusted in the period until the Act on the Restoration of the Provisions expires.

- Overview of Island Priorities

The government commissioner and the island council have jointly come up with a list of 12 priorities¹ for the short and longer term. This list focuses on the well-being of citizens and prioritises topics such as healthcare, notarial services and social housing. This list is involved in the St. Eustatius Agreement 2022-2023.

- The route-timetable

On the 15th of November 2021, my predecessor sent you the route-timetable set by the government commissioner, in accordance with the Özutok motion². Because the island council made it known at the time that it did not agree with this route-timetable, this document was included in the mediation process. The mediation discussions have led to the following intended time frame for the return of powers:

Phase 2.0 – September 2022:

In view of the results already achieved and the island council's commitment that the remaining island ordinances will be adopted and come into effect before the summer recess, the government commissioner and the island council have come to the conclusion that the criteria for phase 2.0 can be achieved in September 2022³. In the chapter on the administrative domain, you can read which steps have been taken and are still being taken to achieve this target date. A Royal Decree is required to achieve phase 2.0 - after which the island council will again receive the power to appoint deputies. I will discuss this in more detail in the *Royal Decree* chapter.

Phase 2.1 – March 2023:

The expectation of both the government commissioner and the island council is that the criteria of phase 2.1 can be met by March 2023. Once phase 2.1 has been reached, the island council and the new executive council will once again exercise their duties and powers with regard to the registry and the official organisation.

Phase 2.2 – to be determined: No agreement has been reached in the mediation process about the target date for achieving the criteria for phase 2.2 and the associated restoration of the budget right. The island council believes that phase 2.2 can start in March 2023. The government commissioner has indicated that in September 2023 the preconditions for a sustainable improvement in financial management can be met. The Public Entity St. Eustatius (openbaar lichaam Sint Eustatius - OLE) must have well-organised processes and financial administration. These form the basis for receiving an unqualified auditor's report in the future. At the moment, work still needs to be done on the planning and

¹ Appendix 1

² Parliamentary Paper number 35925-IV-34, appendix to the Eighth Progress Report on Saint Eustatius.

³ For more information, please refer to Appendix 2.

Date
29 juni 2022

Reference
2022-0000341948

control cycle in accordance with the Public Entities of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba (Finances) Act (FinBES) and the digitisation and centralisation of financial processes. This includes improving the administration organisation and internal control (AO/IC), debtor management and merging nine administrations into one well-organised system. It is important to agree on how far the OLE has progressed towards the criteria for phase 2.2. It has therefore been jointly agreed to have an assessment carried out by an independent financial expert. Based on the results of this assessment, I will inform you about the target dates for reaching phase 2.2 before the end of 2022.

Phase 3.0 and beyond – to be determined: The target dates for phase 3.0 and beyond are in line with the commencement date of phase 2.2. Before the end of 2022, I will therefore inform you about the target dates of the subsequent phases in addition to the commencement date of phase 2.2. When phase 3.0 is reached, the relations along the lines of the Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba (Public Bodies) Act (WolBES) and the FinBES will be restored and the procedure for the appointment of an island governor can be started.

Below you will find a short schematic representation of the new route-timetable.

Phase	Return powers	Target date for reaching the criteria to move to the next phase	Applicable article of the St. Eustatius Act on the Restoration of the Provisions
2.0	Island council is given the power to appoint and dismiss deputies.	September 2022	Article 13. (Restore facilities of the island deputies)
2.1	The island council and executive council acquire duties and powers with regard to the registry and official organisation.	01/03/2023	Article 14. (Restore facilities of the registry and official organisation)
2.2	The island council and executive council acquire financial duties and powers based on the FinBES.	Q3 2022 assessment independent financial expert; Target date will be communicated before the end of 2022.	Article 15. (Restore responsibility for financial tasks)

3.0 ff.	Full restoration of regular administrative relationships along the lines of the WoIBES and the FinBES. The island governor will again acquire his own duties and powers and a number of additional powers.	Target dates will be communicated before the end of 2022.	Article 16. (Restore island governor)
----------------	--	---	---------------------------------------

Table 1: The new route-timetable

I am pleased that there is now more clarity about achieving the next two phases in the St. Eustatius Act on the Restoration of the Provisions. Later this year, clarity will also be provided about the progress of the other phases. This meets the wishes of the cabinet, the island council and the House of Representatives to restore administrative relations on St. Eustatius as soon as possible, and the recommendation of the Netherlands Court of Audit to clarify the timeline for the return of fully-fledged local governance⁴.

With the determination of the target dates for the start of phase 2.0 and 2.1 and the further explanation in this progress report, I consider the Wuite motion⁵ to be completed.

Royal Decree

A Royal Decree is always required to move on to the next phase in the St. Eustatius Act on the Restoration of the Provisions. The procedure for issuing a Royal Decree includes a preliminary procedure in which the draft decision is submitted to both Houses of the States General at least four weeks in advance. On the 6th of June, I received a letter from the government commissioner explaining the progress and the results achieved with regard to the criteria to move to phase 2.0 (Appendix 2). Based on the information provided, I am confident that the criteria for phase 2.0 will be met by September. My aim is therefore - with due observance of the procedure - to have the Royal Decree issued as soon as possible. I will therefore send the draft Royal Decree including an explanatory memorandum to both Houses in the very near future. With the entry into force of phase 2.0, the island council acquires the power to appoint and possibly dismiss island deputies. The executive council resumes its regular duties and powers, with the exception of those relating to the official organisation and financial duties. These powers remain with the government commissioner. The latter will make working agreements with the new deputies with regard to the 2023 budget and its implementation.

⁴ Netherlands Court of Audit, Accountability Survey Kingdom Relations (IV) and the BES Fund (H) p. 22.

⁵ Parliamentary Paper number: 35925 IV.

St. Eustatius Agreement 2022-2023 and the island priorities

In order to raise the standard of living and increase social well-being in the Caribbean Netherlands, agreements have been made with St. Eustatius under the coalition agreement. These agreements, also known as *St. Eustatius Agreement 2022-2023*, were signed during my visit. The list of priorities from the mediation process is included in this Agreement⁶ and agreements have also been made about a number of follow-up actions for criteria from the Explanatory Memorandum of the St. Eustatius Act on the Restoration of the Provisions. The agreements are made between the government commissioner and the Kingdom, including my ministry, in order to be able to work together in a targeted manner. To implement these agreements, the cabinet has allocated €30 million structurally for the whole of the Caribbean Netherlands. The agreements and their financial aspects are detailed in the spring memorandum. The subjects are diverse: from free-ranging livestock to social housing, from improving the quality of healthcare to notarial services. After the elections in March 2023, I want to make new agreements with the newly elected island councillors and deputies for 2023 and beyond. Before the summer recess, I will inform the Houses about the results of the spring memorandum and the agreements I have made with the islands during my trip.

As you see, there are currently many and different projects on and concerning St. Eustatius. With this letter, I give you an idea of what is happening in the administrative, physical and social domain. This letter also has three appendices. The first appendix is an overview of the joint island priorities. The second appendix is the explanation request for restoration of the St. Eustatius democracy in time-bound phases. The third appendix is an overview of the projects that are active or have already been completed.

Administrative domain

As you could read in the previous chapter, a lot of work has been done in recent months on the steps that are part of the route-timetable and the criteria that must be met to move to phase 2.0. This, of course, with the aim of completing this phase so that the next phase can be initiated. Under *a.* to *d.* below, I explain the status of the criteria that fall within this phase. The OLE is also already working on criteria that must be completed after phase 2.0. These developments are explained in more detail in parts *e* to *g*.

a. The island ordinances have been established and have entered into force (phase 2.0)

Recently, the OLE has been busy updating the island ordinances. There are still four regulations out of 86 and a decree to be updated. The government commissioner and the island council agree that this criterion must be completed before the summer recess of 2022. At the beginning of June, the passenger

⁶ Appendix 2

transport decree was put on the agenda for the meeting of the Central Committee, after which the other regulations will soon follow. In addition to these regulations and the decree, the Nature Ordinance has also been updated and is being processed for adoption. The Nature Ordinance is not a requirement for achieving this criterion, but it is important for tackling stray livestock and the agricultural development of the island: two subjects that the government commissioner and the island council have designated as island priorities for the foreseeable future⁷.

b. Procedures and work instructions of the executive council are in order (phase 2.0)

This criterion was completed in 2021. The working processes of the executive council have been analysed, the gaps in the decision-making processes have been filled and the working processes of the executive council have been clarified. This has made the decision-making process more transparent and efficient.

c. Administration for permits and/or exemptions, granting subsidies and the land registry function are ready (phase 2.0)

The administration of permits and exemptions is a criterion for which a great deal of work has already been done. The criterion is closely related to updating the regulations that serve as a legal basis for granting permits and/or exemptions. A total of 42 permit obligations were examined in collaboration with the Municipality of Breda and 10 to 15 new permits were drawn up on the basis of renewed regulations. Professionalisation has also been made and the most commonly used application forms have been critically examined and adjusted, if necessary. The next step is to implement the new administration system, which will update the archive. Finally, there must be transparency about the issued permits. That is why from now on permits will be published with both the application and the issue. Agreements have been made about this in the St. Eustatius Agreement 2022-2023. The fact that the step towards digitisation has yet to be made, does not alter the fact that the criterion – preparing the administrations – has been met. With regard to the *Land Registry* sub-criterion, the backlogs in the administration have been processed. On 1 January 2021, the BES Land Registry Act came into effect and the responsibility for the land registry function was transferred to Land Registry St. Eustatius. In May 2022, St. Eustatius received source documents from Land Registry Sint Maarten. These source documents contain important cadastral information and this sub-criterion is also completed.

d. Supervision and Enforcement is in order (phase 2.0)

A lot has happened concerning this criterion in the past year, both in the field of policy and in the more practical aspects of supervision and enforcement. The general policy for supervision and enforcement has been established and has come into effect. In addition, the enforcement arrangement for waste materials and the Commodities Act have been introduced. The Implementation Agenda for Supervision and Enforcement 2022-2025 is laid down in the St. Eustatius

⁷ An overview of the priorities can be found in Appendix 1.

Agreement 2022-2023. This agenda describes the actions that will follow to get enforcement in order. The OLE has also added two important enforcement tools for enforcement at the local level. These are the 'Administrative coercion order' and the 'Order subject to a penalty'. In addition, the OLE has worked on filling the capacity shortage. A new building inspector was recently hired. The enforcement instruments have also been expanded to include decibel meters to counteract noise pollution. The inspectors followed a training course for this in December and will shortly also participate in a follow-up training course.

In the past six months, steps have also been taken to work towards the criteria of phase 2.1 and 2.2:

e. Personnel policy (phase 2.1)

One of the criteria for reaching phase 2.1 is putting the personnel policy in order. Important results have been achieved in this criterion. For example, a regulation on personnel management and personnel policy and an organisational decision have been adopted and entered into force, the organisational decision has been completed and the remuneration decision was adopted on 12 April. Work is still in progress on drawing up and implementing the personnel cycle (P cycle) for OLE employees.

f. Training of civil servants and politicians (phase 2.1)

The OLE is also busy with the criterion 'offering a training program for civil servants and politicians' for reaching phase 2.1. In the previous progress report, my predecessor indicated that the Statia Academy will be established as of January 2022. Unfortunately, the learning platform does not meet the OLE's wishes. We are currently looking for another online learning platform that can offer all courses properly. This platform is expected to be launched in September 2022. In the meantime, training courses are already being offered, both online and physically. This is partly done in collaboration with the Statia public entity. In the first week of June, the island council members followed various courses via the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD). Work is currently underway on the offer for the (yet to be appointed) deputies.

g. Financial management improvement plan (phase 2.2)

The OLE is currently making efforts to address the auditor's findings. The improvements should lead to an unqualified audit opinion on the 2023 financial statements. Since the eighth progress report, the planning and control cycle has improved and St. Eustatius has rejoined the FinBES cycles since 2021. The OLE also made up for the backlog in preparing the annual accounts. The Board for Financial Supervision (College financieel toezicht - Cft) has made recommendations in the 2022 budget that the OLE should introduce, five of which still need to be implemented. In the upcoming period, three main themes will be worked on: improving the administration organisation and internal control (AO/IC), debtor management and merging nine administrations into one well-organised system.

Project Management Organisation (PPMO)

Due to the neglect of the tasks of the previous board, little maintenance and innovation was carried out until 2018 on the projects that the board had to work on. As a result, the OLE is struggling with a maintenance backlog, which dates back to 2018. Projects have been started to make up for these arrears, a number of which have now been completed⁸. These projects vary from road maintenance, social projects and projects aimed at nature and the environment.

Supervising the projects in the various domains required a lot of capacity from the ministries. There was also a lack of coordination. That is why the PPMO was launched in September 2021 within the organisational structure of the OLE. The objective of the PPMO is to effectively coordinate the implementation of the projects on St. Eustatius.

The PPMO is separate from the criteria for return to democracy, but it is important for the proper implementation of the projects on St. Eustatius, which is why I did not want to leave this organisation unnamed.

Physical domain

Projects in the physical domain are visible developments for the St. Eustatius residents. Attention is paid to drinking water facilities and progress has been made in tackling stray livestock and the NEPP programme. Furthermore, there are updates on the anti-erosion projects and the road works:

STUCO multi-year strategy

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (IenW) is making €4.5 million available for investments in the drinking water supply for the years 2020-2023. The STUCO utility company has delivered a multi-year strategy for spending this. Among other things, it will expand the drinking water network and make it robust for the future. Vitens Evides International (VEI) will support STUCO in this major task and advise on the investment program and the management and maintenance of the facility.

Progress on stray livestock and the NEPP program

The Nature and Environment Policy Program (NEPP program) was mentioned in the previous progress report. The first part of this program is to recruit a project manager for the NEPP program as a whole and a project leader for the Stray Livestock component. These vacancies have now been filled so that the implementation of the NEPP program can begin. In the meantime, steps have also been taken to clear stray livestock. Although the corona pandemic has caused meat export problems in the past two years, a total of 76 cows, 203 sheep, 878 goats, 3 boars and 129 pigs were culled in 2021. These were all stray animals. During my visit, I agreed with the OLE that this issue will be tackled as a matter of priority. The OLE will shortly prepare an action plan, in which a coherent and sustainable approach is presented.

⁸ An overview of the number of active and completed projects can be found in Appendix 3.

Anti-erosion

During my visit to the island I have seen the challenge of erosion on the island. At the airport, for example, erosion causes problems with water drainage. At the end of March, the Water Drainage project along the airport on St. Eustatius was awarded to a local party. This measure will prevent further erosion of the so-called gullies at the airport in the short term. At the same time, the measures offer opportunities in the field of agriculture. By discharging water in a controlled manner, this water can be used for agriculture. The implementation of this project started in April. In the next progress report I will inform you about the first results.

In addition to anti-erosion measures with rainwater, work is also being done on anti-erosion measures caused by currents, tides and wave action. In the previous progress report, it was reported that the first measurement results for the currents, tides and wave action were being analysed. In collaboration with Rijkswaterstaat (the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management), the OLE is developing an action plan to restore the harbour of St. Eustatius and improve its accessibility and safety. This development should lead to the current harbour becoming future-proof and hurricane-proof.

Road works update

The tender for the renovation of the Airport Boulevard has started and construction is expected to start in the second quarter of 2022. This road will include two roundabouts, space for pedestrians and a drainage system that is part of the above-mentioned Water Drainage project. Furthermore, the tender for the Oranjabaiweg renovation project started in April 2022. This road connects the harbour and the Lower Town area to the rest of the island. The previous progress report stated that the road project "The Road behind the Mountain " was set to take place in early 2022. This road project has been slightly delayed, but the OLE has informed me that it plans to launch the tender in the third quarter of 2022. This road project is financed, among other things, from the multi-year contribution from IenW for the infrastructural tasks of the islands and with a limited supplement from my ministry.

Windward Islands Ferry Connection

On my second visit to St. Eustatius, I used the ferry connection. The ferry connection is currently a pilot project that will run until the end of this year. The pilot project will then be evaluated. As soon as the results of the evaluation are known, I will inform you about this.

Social domain

The social domain on St. Eustatius faces major challenges. In order to implement this domain, discussions are currently underway between the OLE and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) to achieve a more active cooperation. This is an attempt to strengthen existing efforts and make facilities more sustainable. In the field of the social domain, VWS and the OLE want to get the

executive and policy power of the Society and Welfare department in order, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Placement and participation

Work is the most sustainable way out of poverty, but not everyone finds a job equally easily. In order to guide more people with a distance to the labour market to work, a number of labour market projects have been started with a special benefit from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (SZW):

- In the vocational training program, ten participants are trained to become welders. After evaluation of the program, the OLE examines how the follow-up training for the welders will be given.
- At the end of February, two sailor training courses were started, in which 25 young people participate. These courses are expected to run until August. After completing the training, the sailors can go to work on commercial boats, such as boats from diving schools or private owners.
- In the third quarter of 2022, a program will start in which fifteen participants will be trained to become caregivers for the elderly.
- Finally, at the initiative of the OLE, ten employees of the St. Eustatius and Bonaire public entities, and of Curaçao, have recently started training to become job coaches.

Administrative Agreement on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse BES 2021-2024

I also pay specific attention to the well-being of children and victims of domestic violence on St. Eustatius. Concrete agreements were made about this last year in the Administrative Agreement on tackling domestic violence and child abuse BES 2021-2024. These agreements have recently paid off. An example of this was the setting up of the Bovenwinden joint advice and reporting centre. In this the OLE works together with the Saba public entity. In the past six months, a project manager has drawn up a work plan for this. The Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Coordinator, who was recently appointed, will further develop the plan of the advisory and reporting centre. Policy is currently being drawn up in close collaboration with chain partners. In addition, the shelter for victims of domestic violence is ready and can open in the third quarter of 2022. The flexible shelter will have three rooms, where women with or without children can stay. The whole family will work on behavioural change through programs aimed at preventing recurrence. An important part of this policy is training employees and entering into a partnership with 'CBP het Samenhuis' in the Netherlands.

Recently, work has also been done on the mental health of young people. In collaboration between my ministry, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the OLE and the children's telephone line 'Telefon pa Hubentud' of Aruba, the children's telephone line 'Guana Chat 918' was successfully launched on 16 March 2022. Setting up a free telephone helpline for children and young people provides a platform to ask questions and raise concerns. This can be about any topic. The children and young people made frequent use of the children's telephone line. In order to guarantee anonymity, a partnership has been set up with the Aruba children's telephone line, which operates the telephone for the children of St.

Eustatius. In consultation with the Aruba children's telephone line, Saba and Bonaire will be gradually connected later this year.

Partnership 13+

On 8 December 2021, the Partnership 13+ Covenant was signed. The covenant aims at more cooperation in the youth domain between the OLE and various ministries such as VWS, BZK, Justice and Security (JenV), SZW, and Education, Culture and Science (OCW). Work is now underway on an agenda for St. Eustatius that sets different goals for young adults. In March, the OLE shared the draft version with the ministries involved. The elaboration of the specific objectives on activities for young people on St. Eustatius from the partnership have been elaborated in the local Action Plan 12+. This Action Plan ensures that the St. Eustatius youth aged 12 and older have the opportunity to grow up in a healthy, safe and promising environment. The focus is on the general development of young people and preventive youth care. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) makes both a financial and substantive contribution to this plan.

Health and sport

VWS and the OLE structurally invest in sport and prevention to improve the health of the inhabitants of St. Eustatius. For sports, this is done through an annual subsidy to the Statia Sports Facility Foundation and support from Dutch sports associations. The multi-year maintenance plan for the sports facilities has also been nearly completed, so that clear agreements can be made about management and maintenance. The Caribbean Sports and Prevention Agreement will expire at the end of this year. In the coming period, VWS will discuss with the OLE how the objectives and activities in the agreement will be continued. With regard to healthcare, it has been agreed that VWS will come up with an action plan at the end of this year to improve healthcare on the island.

Prevention clinic

The prevention clinic opened its doors on the 14th of February. The aim of the clinic is to provide the St. Eustatius residents with knowledge to stay healthy as long as possible. They do this, among other things, by providing the population with information. Prevention is essential and the clinic will coordinate all primary activities in this area and further interventions. For the second quarter, for example, the roll-out of the population screening for cervical and breast cancer is planned.

Social housing

A well-known problem in the Caribbean Netherlands is the lack of affordable housing. There are currently not enough homes available on St. Eustatius. In addition, housing costs are difficult for many people to bear. To structurally tackle this problem, the Minister of VRO is currently working closely with the islands to draw up a policy agenda on public housing and spatial planning in the Caribbean Netherlands (VRO CN). This agenda proposes three overarching themes: basis in order, availability and affordability. However, the cabinet and the OLE realise that

this is an urgent problem. That is why temporary measures are being taken that are aimed at affordability and availability of housing. There are currently 95 social rental homes available on St. Eustatius. Since 2019, BZK has been providing an annual subsidy to landlords in the social rental sector to make housing more affordable. This landlord subsidy gives landlords the opportunity to request a lower rent from minimum-income households. For St. Eustatius, it was \$216,000 in 2021.

BES(t) 4 Kids

In the eighth progress report, my predecessor wrote that the cost-reducing subsidies of the Temporary Subsidy Scheme Financing Childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands for childcare organisations have been increased as of 1 July 2021. In addition, the subsidies have been increased by 10 percent as of 1 January 2022. This will enable childcare organisations to absorb the financial consequences of raising the statutory minimum wage as of 1 January 2022. In addition, efforts have been made to strengthen the childcare organisations by offering training programs for employees. Steps have also been taken to develop new accommodation for out-of-school care. In the third quarter of 2022, the OLE will select a contractor to complete the building, which is expected in the second quarter of 2024. When the building is finished, about 300 children will be able to participate in after-school care and other activities in this building every day. This so-called Out of School building is partly financed from the Caribbean Netherlands regional envelope.

Notarial services

Notary public Mr Boekhoudt recently indicated that he would stop offering notarial services on St. Eustatius and Saba. The issue of notarial services has my attention. I understand the concerns of residents on St. Eustatius and Saba and I am in close contact with my colleague, the Minister for Legal Protection. The Joint Court of Justice of Aruba, Curaçao, Sint-Maarten and of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba has recently posted a vacancy to appoint a temporary deputy. The idea is that the deputy will start as soon as possible, but this depends on how quickly the procedure can be completed and when the deputy can start. In addition to this short-term solution, a temporary observer, together with the Ministry of JenV, the Joint Court is also working on a long-term solution in which Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius fall under one notarial protocol. It is important that access to justice is permanently secured on the BES islands in the coming years. This is also expressed in the JenV policy agenda 2021-2025. In the next progress report I will inform you about the progress.

Archaeological excavations

In the previous progress report, you read about the excavations near the airport and the research that the Statia Heritage Research Committee (SHRC) was engaged in. The investigation has now been completed and they have prepared a report with their findings and recommended measures. The OLE is still in talks with those involved (including the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)

about the implementation of these measures. I hope to be able to tell you more about this in the next report.

Miscellaneous

GTI developments

During my trip, the government commissioner expressed concern about the future of oil storage on St. Eustatius, the largest employer on the island. Together with her, I met the management of GTI to get an update on the state of affairs. Due to the market conditions and the current low rates for the storage of fossil fuels, Prostar, which includes GTI Statia, has to deal with declining revenues. It is still unclear how the situation will develop further.

It is evident that the government commissioner and the island council are concerned about possible major negative consequences for the island. However, neither the cabinet nor the OLE has any role with regard to Prostar's financial position. We do, however, keep a close eye on developments jointly. In addition, I will consult with my fellow ministers in order to arrive at an interdepartmental approach, if necessary, so that the OLE can be supported within the agreed division of roles.

Conclusion

As you can read, important steps have been taken in recent months, especially in the administrative domain. The results of the mediation process contribute to the perspective towards the full restoration of democracy. I am therefore confident that the OLE will be successful in meeting the criteria. My ministry will of course support this, if necessary. In the next report, which is scheduled for December, I will inform you about the target dates for phase 2.2 and onwards, as well as about the progress in the social, administrative and physical domain.

The State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
Digitisation and Kingdom Relations

Alexandra C. van Huffelen