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Introduction

I want to use this letter to inform your House of the progress of the projects on St. Eustatius and the progress based on the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act. You received the last progress report on 31¹ May, which contents were discussed in the Committee Deliberations St. Eustatius on 2 June.

Background

St. Eustatius has a new administration as of 18 June. On that day, I appointed Ms M.A.U. Francis as Government Commissioner and Ms C. Toet as Deputy Government Commissioner. I spoke with Ms Francis on 4 November during her work visit to the Netherlands. The Government Commissioner and I concluded that many challenges remain, but that St. Eustatius is steadily making progress.

For example, I described the IT project, among others, in the previous progress report, which has now been concluded successfully. The gridlock in the Roaming Animals project was also discussed, while the parties have now agreed on a newly developed overall approach. In addition, further preparations were made for a number of construction projects, such as the Gwendoline van Putten school and the Road Behind The Mountain. Finally, the airport was opened after a prudent design and tender process.

The basis of the administrative intervention has not changed since 2018: restoring the legal order for the well-being of the population of St. Eustatius. Lasting results are being pursued intensively pursuant to the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act. This leads to development opportunities for the island and its residents.

For the purpose of executing the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act and in the context of the Özütok c.s.² resolution, the Public Entity of St Eustatius (OLE) worked intensively on completing the route-timetable in the past period and the first steps for achieving the criteria have been taken. Progress has also been made in modernising the facilities of civil servants and in addressing the multitude of

¹ House of Representatives, 2020-2021, Parliamentary Paper 35 570 IV, no. 42.

² House of Representatives, 2019-2020, Parliamentary Paper 35422, no. 8.

outstanding projects on St. Eustatius. Progress has also been made in the social and physical domains.

This report has 3 annexes:

- Annexe 1: The route-timetable to execute the Özütok c.s. resolution
- Annexe 2: Answer to the letter from the Government Commissioner of 29 November 2021.
- Annexe 3: Forwarded response from the St. Eustatius Island Council to the Van Dam-promise (3 June 2020) concerning (the added value of) citizen participation.

General

Restoring the regular democratic relationships on St. Eustatius will take a long time. The twelve criteria to be implemented as set out in the Explanatory Memorandum of the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act are not a checklist that can be easily completed. These topics must be implemented in a lasting manner and this takes time.

I discussed the route-timetable in my previous report. In accordance with the Özütok resolution, I requested the Government Commissioner to work on a route-timetable in consultation with the Island Council. The Government Commissioner sent me the adopted route-timetable on 15 November. The execution of the route-timetable is an ongoing concern in order to achieve lasting improvements. For this reason, the Government Commissioner will assess the schedule that must be observed to meet the target dates every 6 months.

Another concern is the COVID-19 situation. Even though COVID-19 infections were limited in the past months, the consequences of the global pandemic can also be felt on St. Eustatius. Not only in social terms, but the economic consequences, too, are experienced throughout the island. For this reason, the Netherlands assisted St. Eustatius with economic help, among others. St. Eustatius has received approximately €6.8 million (USD 7.7 million) from the National Government of the Netherlands based on the aid package scheme to date.

On 30 August, I informed you by means of a Letter to the House³ that the aid and recovery package (NOW and TVL) will be terminated for the Caribbean Netherlands with effect from the fourth quarter of 2021. The OLE will need to focus on reopening the island. It is important in this respect that relaunching the economy is accompanied by increasing the vaccination rate. After all: the higher the vaccination rate, the more measures can be eliminated.

The fact that the vaccination rate is (too) low was also mentioned in my last letter. Now, six months later, the vaccination rate among adults increased from 46 per cent to 56 per cent.⁴ As of June, the young population between the ages of 12 and

³ Parliamentary Papers II, 2021/22, 2021Z14695.

⁴ State of affairs on 11 November 2021.

17 is being vaccinated, which leads to an overall vaccination rate of 46 per cent. This is not the desired vaccination rate for fully reopening the island nine months after the arrival of the first vaccines on St. Eustatius. However, I believe that all economic activities must be re-initiated and that the OLE must continue to take measures for the unvaccinated. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) will continue to advise the OLE on options for increasing the vaccination rate. I want to again emphasise to the residents of St. Eustatius that a high vaccination rate is the basis for a resilient economy and public health in these times.

Administrative domain

The previous progress report revolved around the steps taken by St. Eustatius since the installation of the Island Council in October 2020. Several months have passed now and I can increasingly often recognise elements of good governance concerning important topics on St. Eustatius.

Good governance

During the Committee Deliberations St. Eustatius on 2 June, I promised to address the frameworks of good governance in this progress report. As set out in the Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba Public Entities Act, good governance is characterised by a high level of professionalism, integrity, decisiveness, and controllability. The twelve criteria set out in the Explanatory Memorandum to the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act are based on these characteristics. The administration must be able to properly perform its duties in order to achieve good governance. This promise has been fulfilled by means of this progress report.

Court of Auditors St. Eustatius

A court of auditors is, inter alia, responsible for assessing the legitimacy of the expenditure by the public administration. Establishing the Court of Auditors St. Eustatius is a criterium from Phase 1.0 of the Explanatory Memorandum to the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act. The Rotterdam Court of Auditors has provided support in this respect. The Court of Auditors St. Eustatius is now operational and is staffed by members of the Rotterdam Court of Auditors. The recruitment of local members is ongoing. The new members are expected to be appointed at the start of 2022. A great step towards a solid, ethical, and self-governing administration.

The route-timetable

The roadmap of the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act has been set out in the route-timetable. As described in the previous St. Eustatius progress report⁵, the route-timetable develops the criteria set out in the Explanatory Memorandum to the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act. In this timetable, sub-results are described and target dates are listed for each criterium. After the Government Commissioner sent a first version of the route-timetable to your House of Representatives in May this year, the OLE used the summer break to develop the details of the route-timetable. The Government Commissioner discussed this document with the Island Council in autumn. I received the developed route-

⁵ House of Representatives, 2020-2021, Parliamentary Paper 35 570 IV, no. 42.

timetable on 15 November. The letter from the Government Commissioner with the route-timetable and two resolutions of the Island Council has been enclosed to this report as Annexe 1. I responded to the Government Commissioner on 29 November. This response can be found in Annexe 2. In this letter, I express my concerns about the cooperation between the Government Commissioner and the Island Council. I also emphasise that the Island Council predominantly holds the key for a more rapid return to the regular administrative relationships itself.

The OLE has developed sub-results for phases 2.0 to 4.0 that show which results can be achieved within which timespan. They also assessed what is needed to achieve these sub-results. St. Eustatius is currently in phase 1.0. The implementation of the criteria preceding phase 1.0 has been completed successfully with the Island Council elections of October 2020. In order to reach the next phase, St. Eustatius must implement the criteria preceding phase 2.0. These criteria include cleaning up the regulations file, restoring the administrative records related to permits, exemptions, and subsidies, implementing high-quality management of the Land Registry role, and rearranging the supervision and enforcement instruments.

A number of these criteria lead to challenges. I already informed your House of Representatives in the second St. Eustatius Progress Report that cleaning up the regulations file and introducing new regulations involve a great deal of work. The OLE must check all existing local laws and regulations and update old decrees. When drawing up new decrees, the residents of St. Eustatius must be involved closely using consultation sessions and town hall meetings. The next step involves specifying the implementation policy. This element also demands intensive efforts from the OLE considering the previously identified backlog in the field of supervision and enforcement.

a) Training programme

A more solid organisation pursuant to the St. Eustatius Provisions Restoration Act is also being created in other fields. For example, civil servants will receive ongoing training through the newly introduced Statia Academy as of 2022. This is an online learning platform focused on providing e-training. It is used to prepare civil servants for their duties, role, and responsibility.

The training programme for politicians will also be initiated. This programme is part of phase 2.1. However, in the context of the accelerated return to regular democratic relationships, this programme will start earlier – at the start of 2022. The training programme involves knowledge about legislation and government relationships and skill-specific training. Establishing a dialogue between the Island Council, the Government Commissioner, and other relevant government bodies will also be an important part of the programme.

b) Financial Governance Improvement Plan

The Financial Governance Improvement Plan belongs to phase 2.2 of the route-timetable. This plan concerns sound financial governance as the foundation of good governance. The OLE has made important steps in improving the financial governance in the past six months. The backlog in preparing and adopting the annual accounts up to 2020 has been addressed, for example. The external auditor has issued a disclaimer of opinion for all these annual accounts, and the OLE is working on resolving the findings of the auditor.

The majority of the measures in the Financial Governance Improvement Plan have been completed. The last outstanding actions are currently being addressed, including, inter alia, the fact that the OLE needs to present a balanced budget. In addition, the existence and the effectiveness of a "sound" administrative organisation within the OLE are being assessed based on a recently developed internal control plan.

The Financial Supervision Board Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba (Cft BES) has resumed its advisory role related to the draft budget as of the budget 2021. The Cft BES also advises on draft amendments to the budget at the request of the Government Commissioner. The budget 2021 and the first two implementation reports of 2021 have also been fully drawn up by these institutions. Previously, this was primarily done by engaging external parties.

The OLE is facing an important period because of the introduction of the route-timetable. The route-timetable gives a clear overview of the schedule and the steps that must be taken. When the route-timetable is evaluated after six months, it can be determined on which criteria St. Eustatius has made progress.

Communication with the residents

Besides the implementation of the route-timetable, OLE prioritises better communication about the progress and the results achieved. The OLE has drawn up a new communication plan for this purpose. This plan includes the more intensive and proactive use of existing and new communication methods. Greater use will be made of visualisations, a clear website, and the use of resident focus groups. In addition, civil servants will receive communication training by the OLE for informing residents about steps that have been taken concerning ongoing projects. This ensures that residents will be properly informed of the developments on the island.

Citizen participation

Efforts are also being made to involve the residents in the developments on the island. The OLE implements citizen participation by regularly organising town hall meetings. In addition, consultation sessions are organised when preparing policy or regulations, and the Government Commissioner and the Deputy Government Commissioner have introduced a weekly consultation meeting as of 1 September. During this consultation meeting, residents of St. Eustatius can talk with the administration about topics they consider important.

During the St. Eustatius committee debate in June 2020, I promised to discuss the added value of a citizen participation council. Annexe 3 contains the letter from the Deputy Government Commissioner in which she announces that the establishment of a citizen participation council has been rejected by the Island Council. This letter fulfils the Van Dam promise (of 3 June 2020).

IT project 'Good governance'

The OLE is also working on modern facilities for civil servants. Up to date facilities allow for effective cooperation. Major steps have been taken in the IT project for modernising the facilities of the civil service. While I reported that the first phase of the IT project was not yet completed in my previous progress report, I can now report that phase 2 of the IT project 'Good governance' is almost finished. This makes St. Eustatius the first island in the Caribbean territory of the Kingdom to transition fully to Microsoft 365. A great performance by colleagues of both SSO-RCN on Bonaire and the Public Entity of St Eustatius. Three OLE locations still need to be transferred to the new, secure network. Phase 2 of the entire project will be completed this year. The last phase of the project will result in well-equipped workplaces that match the to-be-constructed Central Government Offices.



One of the IT training courses offered to civil servants of the OLE.

Social and cultural domain

There is also a multitude of ongoing projects in the social and cultural domain. St. Eustatius focuses on its young residents, as they are the future of the island. It does this by, *inter alia*, investing in a promising environment for young residents, sports and exercise, youth participation, and labour opportunities.

BES(t) 4 Kids

Based on the BES(t) 4 Kids programme, both the National Government of the Netherlands and St. Eustatius worked on improving the quality of childcare in the past months. For example, the subsidies for childcare organisations have been increased. This led to a reduction of the parent contribution and improvements to the quality of childcare as of 1 July. One of the ambitions is the exchange of pedagogic policy. For this reason, St. Eustatius set up a 'twinning' programme with the Dutch OPSTOOM childcare organisation.

In the context of this cooperation, employees of the childcare organisations, the boards, parents, and other parties involved participated in an online two-week programme on pedagogic policy in August. This programme included meetings and training courses with staff and boards of childcare centres. The directors of three childcare centres spent three weeks in the Netherlands in September. The goal of the visit was to experience how childcare is organised in the Netherlands with respect to management, pedagogic quality, and in the workplace.

Labour mediation and participation

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment grants special benefits for a number of labour market projects. The 'Everyone participates' trial is a programme for job seekers with disadvantages on the labour market. They are given the opportunity to gain experience at regular employers in various industries for the period of one year. The first year has now ended and two of the eleven participants have started successfully at their employers, two participants have stopped, and the rest of the participants have moved to the next year. With respect to another programme, 'Golden Opportunity', 25 participants successfully completed their training. The New Challenges Foundation arranged the programme in cooperation with the recently opened Golden Rock Nature & Dive Resort. After seven months of training and traineeship, fourteen students were placed at the resort with a perspective of additional placements after the official opening in September. The 'vocational training programme' has started recently. As part of this programme, fourteen participants are trained as welders for the position of local welder at the oil terminal of GTI Statia. This programme will end in March 2022.

Sports and exercise for youth

The cabinet has made funds available for additional short-term support for youth, social and mental well-being, lifestyle, and sports. Based on the Caribbean Sports and Prevention Agreement, coaches of the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB) and the Dutch Volleyball Association (NeVoBo) organised a summer camp on the island for children and coaches in August. Sixty young athletes attended daily practices in the course of two weeks. In addition, twenty coaches obtained their coaching diploma. Attention is also paid to swimming skills among young people: Nine candidate instructors have started a training programme to teach swimming lessons to children. This allows more children on St. Eustatius to learn swimming and makes children enthusiastic about sports and exercise.



The Government Commissioner (6th from the right) with representatives of NeVoBo, KNVB, the Statia Sports Facility Foundation, International Boys, and the Social Domain Directorate at the kick-off meeting of the summer camp.

More activities will be organised in the coming period thanks to these funds. These revolve around a memorandum of understanding signed recently between St. Eustatius and Saba with the intention to cooperate in the field of sports. This memorandum includes the joint development of knowledge and skills, enhancing the existing sports infrastructure, and finding a connection with organised sports in the region and European Netherlands.

Action Plan 12+

The social domain has a number of ongoing projects for children, young people, and young adults. Activities are offered aimed at these specific groups. The Action Plan 12+ gives the youth of St. Eustatius aged 12 years and older 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. For example, youth workers help teenagers with their development. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) makes both a financial and substantive contribution to this plan.

Youth participation

Another essential element of the development of young people is youth participation. The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations has been working with UNICEF on improving the rights of children in Caribbean Netherlands for a number of years now. Youth participation and youth participation are important elements of this goal. The online participation process of UNICEF, #mijnnieuwewereld, asked young residents of Caribbean Netherlands about their opinion concerning the consequences of the corona crisis and how they see their future.

Together with the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports, it will be determined how young residents of Caribbean Netherlands can be involved in new (youth) policy to the greatest extent possible. Various activities are already taking place. Examples are sports exchanges with other islands and dance and drama teachers visiting the island during the summer holidays. A debate group has also been set up. Students between the ages of eleven and eighteen can develop their speaking skills here to be able to talk with key figures on the island. They learn to lobby, debate, and, ultimately, how to achieve change on St. Eustatius, in the Kingdom, and, hopefully, the world.

Airport excavations

On 16 September, the House of Representatives requested to be informed of the state of affairs concerning the archaeological survey on the site of the F.D. Roosevelt airport. I fulfilled this request on 8 October. The Statia Heritage Research Committee (SHRC) is currently conducting a study into the state of affairs concerning the excavations. We are monitoring this process and await the study results with interest. Where necessary, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science provides the Public Entity of St. Eustatius with advice.

Physical domain

The physical domain includes the nature and infrastructure on the island. The nature of St. Eustatius requires attention to flourish again. The infrastructure arranges the connection with islands surrounding St. Eustatius. Both are important for a sustainable investment in tourism and, accordingly, the economy. They also contribute to the liveability of the island. For this reason, the OLE recently commissioned the expansion and renovation of the Gwendoline van Putten school. The start of the construction is scheduled for March 2022.

Opening of the airport

The new FISO (Flight Information Service Office) tower and passenger terminal at the F.D. Roosevelt Airport were opened festively on 27 August 2021. Festivities with music and dance celebrated that St. Eustatius now has an airport ready for the future. The Government Commissioner thanked the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations in her speech for their support on behalf of the residents of St. Eustatius. An area of concern is the multi-annual management and maintenance programme of the airport. The financial options for this management are currently being explored.



The official opening of the new terminal

Anti-erosion

A great deal of attention was again paid in the last six months to measures for preventing further erosion. The first results of the studies into flows, tides, and waves are now available and being analysed. The results are used for measures against coastal erosion and for renovating and expanding the seaport.

Road work

The Road Behind the Mountain road project is being initiated with increased urgency. This road is important for the economic development of the island because it leads to an area with extensive tourism facilities. This is why its proper accessibility is essential. The goal is to start the tender process for the Road Behind the Mountain in Q1 of 2022. Work has already taken place in November to improve the road ahead of the final reconstruction. The road has been expanded, levelled, and provided with a water-repelling top layer. The first phase of the airport boulevard is also being worked on. The tender for this road is also expected to take place in Q1 of 2022. The OLE will ensure that local contractors will have sufficient opportunities to participate in these projects.



The maintenance condition (in September) of the Road Behind the Mountain.



Temporary work has taken place in November to make the Road Behind the Mountain sufficiently accessible.

Roaming animals

The seventh progress report states that the Roaming Animals project faces resistance from residents and farmers. The resistance concerned the start of the work in the Boven National Park, while residents in urban areas experienced significant issues caused by roaming animals. It is important that the damage to nature in the Boven National Park stops as soon as possible before it becomes irreversible. For this reason, the decision was made to remove the animals in urban areas and natural areas at the same time to the greatest extent possible. Because the issue of roaming animals is not an isolated incident, the OLE has developed a comprehensive approach. The approach consists of agricultural development, nature recovery, the removal of roaming animals, improving the veterinary services, and food safety. The Land & Water steering committee has now adopted this programme, called the Comprehensive Land Recovery Approach.



This is a common view on St. Eustatius. The Caribbean Netherlands Science Institute (CNSI) calculated at the start of this year that an estimated number of 15,000 goats are roaming the northern part of the island, of which 8,000 in Boven National Park.

The programme is part of the Nature and Environment Implementation Agenda (NEPP) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. This implementation agenda focuses on creating a resilient and healthy national environment where important Caribbean species and ecosystems can be preserved. At the same time, there must be room for social-economic development and preserving the cultural identity of the island.

Conclusion

You can see that steady efforts have been made in the last six months and that a lot has taken place. I want to thank everyone committed to helping the island. In the past few years, I have had the opportunity to see that the residents of St. Eustatius are energetic and proud. But I must also conclude that we are not done yet. Things need to be improved to ensure that the results of the administrative intervention can be embedded. If everyone takes his or her responsibility and acts adequately in accordance with the frameworks of good governance, the regular relationships on St. Eustatius can be restored and benefit the island and its residents.

The State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations,

drs. R.W. Knops