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Committee for evaluation of the constitutional structure of the Caribbean Netherlands

Joined together for five years: Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba and the European Netherlands

A lot has changed on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba since 10 October 2010. A great deal of time, money and energy has been invested both by the three islands and by central government to make the transition a success. In 2010 optimism prevailed, with high expectations. A lot of work has been done in recent years. Many changes have been prepared and implemented in a short space of time. However, the results of these efforts are variable.

Clear positive results have been achieved, for example in health care and education. The committee has concluded that successes have particularly been achieved in areas where the plans are ambitious and the agreements concrete. But there is a lot that is still disappointing. Despite the intention to exercise restraint in introducing new laws and regulations, still in practice a great deal has changed. There is dissatisfaction with certain changes. Islanders feel that they have not been involved in the changes enough, and that insufficient account has often been taken of the special circumstances on the islands. The problem of poverty has increased, partly due to the declining purchasing power and the low level of social provisions. There are also deficiencies in the maintenance of the physical infrastructure.

The committee has concluded that disappointing results are caused by a number of factors. Agreements made are not always clear and are interpreted differently. The most striking example is the agreement to reach 'a standard of services and provisions that is acceptable within the Netherlands'. The differences in language, scale and culture are making the collaboration between Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba and central government more difficult. Central government's approach is fragmented, and knowledge of the specific circumstances on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba is often limited. In addition, the local administration has not yet reached the required level of quality.

Not all developments on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba since 10 October 2010 are related to the constitutional reform. Just like the European part of the Netherlands, the islands have also been affected by the global economic and financial crisis. Aside from this, economic development has also been limited. Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba and the European part of the Netherlands lack a shared approach which offers prospects for future economic development.

At the moment a widely felt disappointment, which has consistently increased since 2010, predominates on the islands. The high expectations which people had at the start of the transition have not all been met. This is largely attributable to the level of prosperity: since 2010 the standard of living has fallen for many people, including those with a job.

After five years the balance is not yet favourable. However, five years is a short period. It is too early for a final judgement. The implementation of the transition is still in full progress. The committee would like the results of the evaluation to provide a spur to bring the original objectives of the constitutional change closer over the coming years. That requires Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba and the European part of the Netherlands to take joint concrete steps - in dialogue with the islanders - which are in the interests of the inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

Background

The islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba have each had a direct link with the Netherlands since 10 October 2010. It was agreed that an evaluation of the effects of the new constitutional structure would take place after five years. The committee has looked at the working of the legislation, the functioning of the new administrative structure and the consequences for the population. The evaluation was carried out on behalf of the executive councils of the public entities of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba and the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

Note for editors, not publication

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