

Translation Mr. J. Th. Wit's letter of November 2nd, 2009 to Mr. Jopie Abraham

Esteemed Mr. Abraham,

You have requested a written legal opinion concerning certain matters which you have presented to me. I hereby comply with your request.

In the referendum of 2004, the majority of the People of Bonaire voted for a “direct link with The Netherlands.” The other options were: 1. Independence; 2. Bonaire as an autonomous country within the Kingdom; and 3. Maintenance of the status quo (Bonaire as island territory of the Netherlands Antilles).

In negotiations with The Netherlands and based on an advisory opinion of the “Raad van State”, the government of Bonaire fleshed out and further developed the concept of a “direct link with The Netherlands”. The end result was that the governments of the Netherlands and Bonaire agreed that Bonaire, like Sint Eustatius and Saba, would become part of the country of The Netherlands as “openbaar lichaam,” such in accordance with Article 134 of the Constitution of The Netherlands. This decision was as reported unanimously approved by the Island Council of Bonaire, within which your party was also then represented.

The Netherlands then commenced giving both legal and practical form to the agreement. In the meantime, for the last two years or so, there has been growing resistance from certain groups and also from your party against various aspects of what The Netherlands is currently in the process of creating. The call for a new referendum has grown louder.

Meanwhile, your party changed from opposition to governing party and the Island Council decided, again unanimously, to hold another referendum. The designated advisory committee has in the meantime handed in their report, *inter alia*, with regard to the formatting of the

questions to be posed in the referendum, to the questions of who can vote and the date of the referendum.

It is obvious that your party and your coalition partner, Mr. Anthony Nicolaas LLM, as well as the majority of the advisory committee are of the opinion that the referendum cannot be limited to the question whether what so far has been achieved as to shaping the new status of Bonaire carries the approval of the population. Instead of, or in any event in addition to, that question, the more important question has to be put to the People of Bonaire whether or not they at all wish to become part of The Netherlands. That being so, it would follow then that an alternative to this option (integration) also has to be presented.

It appears that the option of “free association” is now being contemplated. The Island Council will have to decide upon this shortly.

In the meantime, the Dutch State Secretary Bijleveld has posed various objections against offering a constitutional alternative in general and against that of “free association” in particular.

The objections brought forward so far are:

- a. For Bonaire to offer an alternative option as opposed to ‘openbaar lichaam’ is contrary to the agreements which have been reached at a governmental level and approved by the Island Council.
- b. The Kingdom of the Netherlands consists of countries, provinces, municipalities and ‘openbare lichamen’. There are no more flavours and thus “free association” is not a realistic option.
- c. It was indeed agreed in 1981 that the island territories have the right to self determination but for the realization of that right, except of course in the case of independence, they would need the cooperation of The Netherlands (and the other countries within the Kingdom). The Netherlands is however of the principled view that it should refuse to give cooperation to any form of ‘free association’, which means that if Bonaire does not agree with the

now offered integration with The Netherlands, it will have to become independent.

None of these objections can cut it. Aside from that, they reek of ‘scare tactics’ and ‘bullying practices’ which a self respecting and in the field of international law very respected country such as The Netherlands, I would hope, would not really want to use.

It is of course true that the very idea of having a referendum which might lead to the rejection of the concept of integration into the Netherlands constitutes an impending breach of the agreements reached at the governmental level. In itself and also because of the tremendous amount of work already done and still being performed in this regard, this would be extremely regrettable. The problem is, though, that the agreement in question (basically, that a direct link with The Netherlands has to be understood as: integration into The Netherlands), having been reached by the government of Bonaire and approved by the representatives of the people, must be deemed to be in violation of valid international norms, and thus *ultra vires*, **without a preceding explicit authorization from the population.**

In pursuance of the United Nations (General Assembly) Resolution 1541 (Principle IX)¹ the question whether or not the overseas territory in question wishes to integrate into the mother country must be submitted to the population of that particular territory expressly and by means of a referendum. This Resolution also requires that the said population be thoroughly informed and in an unbiased fashion about the pros and cons of such a serious undertaking. During the referendum of 2004 in Bonaire, the integration option was not, or, in any event, not in so many words as it had been in Curacao, presented to the population, while the requirement for thorough and concrete information seems not to have been fulfilled at all. Dr. Hillebrink, in his clearly written doctoral thesis about this subject,

¹ It is stated therein that the “Integration should be the result of the freely expressed wishes of the territory’s peoples acting with full knowledge of the change in their status, their wishes having been expressed through informed and democratic processes, impartially conducted and based on universal adult suffrage.”

points this out. He submits, albeit cautiously but still clearly, that the ‘direct link with The Netherlands’ options on Bonaire and Saba “could perhaps be seen as a form of integration, although the precise ramifications of these options were uncertain at the time the referenda were held”. And he concludes: “This means that the requirements for integration of Resolution 1541 were not fully met because the population was not (and could not be) accurately informed about the consequences of its choice.”² A direct link with The Netherlands is clearly not, at least not automatically, the same as integration into The Netherlands.

Why are such strict requirements observed in international law when it pertains to integration into the motherland? Because, the international community looks with suspicion at this form of self-determination, and reasons that under the guise of integration intrinsic colonial and uneven relations could be continued or re-introduced.³

It is an inescapable fact that it is the population of Bonaire – and not its government - who will have to take a well informed decision with regards to integration into The Netherlands. Without such popular support the continuation of the current trajectory will be a violation of international law and will result in the forced incorporation of Bonaire. Considering that one has to take into account the possibility that the population might vote against this option, then it is obvious that alternatives have to be presented.

Moreover, I note with some trepidation, that the above is equally valid for Saba (where the population also voted for a direct link with The Netherlands) and even more forcefully for St. Eustatius (where the population, by a greater majority, voted for the maintenance of the Netherlands Antilles). It is indeed a fact that on those islands no great

² See Dr. S. Hillebrink, *Political Decolonization and self-determination. The Case of the 4 Netherlands Antilles and Aruba*, 2007, page 194 (inclusive note 14).

³ See Hillebrink, a.w., page 92: “The resolution clearly creates higher standards for integration than for association, both with regard to the consent of the status and the procedure by which it is achieved. This reflects a critical attitude towards integration among states...Many states feared the colonial powers would use integration as a legal façade behind which colonial rule would simply continue.

resistance has been noticed against the integration into The Netherlands but what is not yet apparent may still emerge and even now one can already surmise that, from the perspective of international law, the entire constitutional construction is built on quicksand.⁴

It is a fraudulent argument to state that there is no room for “free association” within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The literature considers, for example, the countries of Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles as a, be it incomplete, form of ‘free association’. The concept covers in practice a lot of forms of direct links between mother countries and overseas territories. According to the authoritative writer, James Crawford: “(t)here is a wide range of choice-particularly in the case of association, which can cover a spectrum of possibilities from virtual independence to virtual integration. The people concerned may be - and have a right – to be free. But there are different forms of freedom.” And he mentions that in this context one can talk of “a ‘sui generis’ option: ‘negotiation with respect to an individualized arrangement mutually agreed by territory and administering power’.”⁵ It is therefore also possible to envisage besides “countries” (the creation of) other constitutional forms within the Charter of the Kingdom.

More strongly put, this is exactly what The Netherlands in 1993 advised during the so-called ‘Toekomst Conferentie’ when it wanted to give to Bonaire, amongst others, the status of “Koninkrijkseiland” (Kingdom Island) and then consequently produced in the second half of the year, after bilateral meetings with Bonaire, a ‘volledig uitgewerkt concept voor een staatsregeling’ (complete draft for a constitution), about which more follows below. It is clear in any case that it is definitely possible to introduce within the Kingdom a new constitutional status. Certainly, where there is a will, there is a way.

⁴ I can still remember vividly back then when on Saba there was talk of the “Kingdom Island” option and strongly referred to the status of Anguilla. Anguilla is actually in no way integrated in the United Kingdom. Integration is an option that the United Kingdom has always refused while integration is the last thing that Anguilla would wish for.

⁵ See James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law*, second edition, 2005, page 636.

But, what if The Netherlands simply does not want to cooperate? What then? My answer is that The Netherlands cannot refuse to cooperate in relation to a form of “free association,” if the Bonairian population in all freedom has voted for this option. This does not mean of course that Bonaire can dictate to The Netherlands anything it wants. The fleshing out of the option voted for will have to be achieved through negotiations and The Netherlands, of course, will play a crucial role therein. But it is not acceptable that The Netherlands puts Bonaire between a rock and a hard place: either you vote for integration, or you must become independent. As I have explained, Bonaire cannot be forced to integrate against its will into The Netherlands nor can it be forced to become independent. If Bonaire votes for a middle of the road solution, then The Netherlands will, on principle and in good faith in all reasonableness, have to cooperate.

The literature is very clear in this as well. After a lengthy discussion thereof, Hillebrink summarizes it thus: “On the basis of GA Resolutions 1541 and 2625 **the population of the islands must be considered free to choose for a free association with the Netherlands**, or to become an integral part of the Netherlands, **or to choose some other status which might better suit their situation. The Netherlands can not veto such a choice in itself** but it can decide on how it will perform the tasks for which an island may request Dutch support, as long as this does not violate the legal principles which should guide the metropolitan states in the process of decolonization.”⁶ And he concludes: “The islands have not agreed to the limiting interpretation proposed by the Netherlands, **and the freedom of choice of the island populations, which is guaranteed by international law, cannot be limited by a unilateral declaration of the Netherlands.**”⁷ In this context it is maybe interesting to mention that the Netherlands in furtherance of this position has always consistently defended the freedom of choice of (other people’s) overseas territories. It would then surely shine positively on The

⁶ Hillebrink, op cit page 261

⁷ Hillebrink, op cit page 264

Netherlands in case it would defend this standpoint with the same passion with regards to its own overseas territories.⁸

As previously said, in the fleshing out of the ‘arrangement’ chosen by the people of Bonaire, Bonaire as well as the Netherlands have to take each other’s legitimate interests as well as the interests of the other Kingdom partners and the Kingdom in its entirety, into consideration whilst having regard to the rules of international law, as found in Chapter IX (Art 73) of the Charter of the United Nations and various GA Resolutions. Important principles in this context are the obligation of the motherland “to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the people, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples,” respecting the “free and genuine expression of the will and choice of the people” and to assist that population in achieving an ‘upgrade’ in their autonomy until the final stage of ‘full self-government’ is achieved.⁹

I arrive now at the report of the referendum advisory committee. I will elaborate on the three most important points: (1) the presentation of the questions in the referendum, (2) the criteria for participation in the referendum, and (3) the date when the referendum has to be held. In view of each of these points the referendum committee has taken a majority- and a minority position.

Let me start with the most important point: The presentation of the questions in the referendum. The minority argues in favour of the question: do you agree with the way in which the direct link with The Netherlands is currently being fleshed out? This question is also favoured by the political circles in the Netherlands.¹⁰ The question,

⁸ See also here Hillebrink, op cit page 253-254.

⁹ See for example Crawford, a.w., page 637: “the fourth option would amount, in this light, to a popular ratification of governing arrangements and, thus, a partial fulfillment of self-determination. At the same time, it would not end their right, flowing from Chapter XI, to elect a change in status.”

¹⁰ See Official note concerning the report “Wet openbare lichamen Bonaire, Sint Eustatius en Saba (WolBes), page 7: “The government assumes that the concept of ‘openbaar lichaam’ (at the referendum in Bonaire) ultimately will not be a point of discussion and that the referendum will pertain to the development of this concept.”

though, touches lightly on the essentially important preliminary question: whether the people of Bonaire really want to be part of The Netherlands.

If the answer to the question as proposed by the minority of the committee would be a 'yes', then there is no problem. After all, the current interpretation of the 'direct link' (Bonaire as an 'openbaar lichaam') is doubtlessly a type of integration within the country of The Netherlands. A resounding 'yes' would mean that the population agrees with Bonaire being integrated into The Netherlands (and in the manner that is currently being worked out). If, however, the answer to that question were to be "no" then confusion arises. Because, what does 'no' mean in this context? It can mean various things: I agree with the integration of Bonaire into The Netherlands but not in this way, which can be split further in (a) in agreement with integration but fully and completely and not, as now, in a limited way (thus more equality with the Dutch in The Netherlands with regards to minimum wages, social benefits, pensions, etc.), and (b) in agreement with integration but with much more autonomy than is currently presented (more "say" or joint control in all areas or some areas such as for example marriage legislation, etc.). The answer 'no' can also mean, and duly so: I do not agree with the essential point ie that Bonaire has to become part of The Netherlands.

In short, this presentation of questions will cause great ambiguity in case of a negative result, which strictly speaking can only be resolved by a third referendum. This has to be avoided, of course.

The questions as presented by the majority (Does the direct link with The Netherlands have to be 'free association' instead of integration?) concurs with international law and has, at least in theory, the advantage that it will make clear whether or not the population wants Bonaire to become part of The Netherlands. That is after all, from the perspective of self-determination, the main question. In this context I have to just point to the stack of BES legislation and the accessory explanatory notes

and (further) official reports, to clarify how far reaching the integration of Bonaire into the country of The Netherlands is (and will become). All the more reasons to let the population (and not their government and representatives) decide on this matter. The right of self-determination is not for nothing a right of the people and not a right of the politicians.

The disadvantage of this presentation of the questions is the term “free association.” As said, this option can take on many forms. This has consequences for the presentation of the questions. The “free association’ has to be explained further in more detail. This is very well possible.

The referendum advisory committee has, in my judgment rightly so, started from the point of view that it is not necessary to go back to the results of the referendum of 2004, regardless of how critically one can look at it. The upcoming referendum has to stay within the band width of the previous referendum. In that previous referendum the people have already expressed their view that they did not consider Bonaire to be ready for a direct link with The Netherlands in the form of an autonomous country (like Aruba and, presumably, Curacao, Sint Maarten). The alternative to integration must therefore be something that lies between integration and an autonomous country. As said, this alternative exists and was once coined as “Koninkrijkseiland,” which means that Bonaire would not be part of The Netherlands, but would continue as an overseas territory as autonomous as possible but performing on the other hand some important tasks in close cooperation with The Netherlands whereby The Netherlands represents the island on an inter-country level within the Kingdom, for example in the area of justice. The fleshing out of such a model must, of course, be done in consultation with The Netherlands but as an alternative model it is clearly useful. The draft constitution of 1993 at the time approved by The Netherlands can in this respect serve as starting point.

The said draft constitution provides Bonaire with its own ‘governor’ (Representative of the Kingdom?), government and parliament and

especially its own legislation, which will be partly fully autonomous, partly in cooperation with The Netherlands (bilateral) and in some areas completely in the hands of The Netherlands (ie Justice and more in particular law enforcement) whereby the functions of the Advisory Council and the Court of Auditors ('Rekenkamer') (as yet) can be deputized by the Dutch Council of State and Court of Auditors. One could rudely call such a model "country minus," with the understanding that it should be possible in principle to acquire more autonomy in the future namely when the island is ready, and has proved to be ready, to take on more responsibilities (a 'country minus' should be able to develop into 'country').

The draft constitution, in particular in the area of legislation, seems to have been inspired by similar constitutions for the British Overseas Territories (BOTs), particularly Anguilla, an island in size and population comparable to Bonaire (which is actually larger and has more inhabitants than Anguilla). In other words, it is a concept that works in practice and it is accordingly a real alternative. It is furthermore an alternative that is reasonable and also providing a framework in which the interests of The Netherlands, expressly in its role as 'flag bearer' of the Kingdom, can be amply met without enclosing Bonaire in a European-Dutch straightjacket in which it cannot be itself anymore. It is above all an alternative, an individualized arrangement, which can be duly defended on grounds of international law. Again, it is a model that The Netherlands, if the population of Bonaire would vote in favour of it, is not allowed to reject out of hand although it can require certain conditions, which are reasonable and not *mala fide* in nature, to be met.

It is certainly true that such a status does not constitute a full 'free association' (not even the current Netherlands Antilles does that). I must remind you, though, that contrary to what is being claimed, Bonaire is not strictly limited by the three options, independence, 'free association' and integration. According to Resolution 2652 (XXV) of 1970, the so called *Declaration on Principles of international Law, Friendly relations and Cooperation Amongst States in Accordance with the*

Charter of the United Nations “overseas territories” can exercise their right to self-determination by choosing “any other political status freely determined by a people.” Ultimately the right to ‘self-determination’ supersedes the right to ‘self-government.’

In light of the above, I therefore advise to adapt the formulation of the referendum questions. They could run as follows:

- a. Do you want Bonaire to become part of The Netherlands or do you want Bonaire to maintain its own status where it takes care of its own affairs as much as possible and otherwise in close cooperation with the Netherlands?¹¹

Answer:

1. Part of The Netherlands;
2. Own status

- b. If you want Bonaire to be part of The Netherlands are you in agreement with the way in which this has been fleshed out thus far?

Answer: 1. Yes, 2. No;

It is of primordial importance that with regards to the two options neutral and expert information is provided. This is not an easy task because the integration option has not been worked out entirely and remains for a great part in *status nascendi* (gestation) while the alternative exists only in rudimentary form. Nevertheless, there are a few ‘bottom lines’ to be pointed out. For one, integration within The Netherlands ultimately leads to the situation that Dutch legislation in its entirety will be applicable in Bonaire except for the least possible deviations, bearing in mind that the question of what “the least possible” is, will be decided in The Netherlands by the Dutch parliament, and maybe, at best, ‘having heard the government of Bonaire.’

¹¹ On reflection, I think that the terms “Koningrijkseiland” and “status sui generis” should be avoided in the presentation of questions to avoid confusion.

There is under the current Dutch Constitution, unlike under the French Constitution, very limited autonomy possible for the subsidiary entities such as municipalities and ‘openbare lichamen.’¹² Amending that Constitution is not only a tiring affair but also completely dependent on the good, or less good, will of the Dutch government and the Dutch parliament. We also know that, after Bonaire and the other BES-islands have been integrated into The Netherlands, there is no way back. Only the option ‘independence’ will be available¹³ but it can hardly be doubted that surely after years of ‘assistance addiction’ tied to a loss of governance experience on a higher level, it will be fairly impossible to make use of this option. These are matters that are clear already and need to be dealt with now.

Another bottom line is that in the case of integration the Dutch model for constitutional structures, legislation and governance will be the starting point. In that process an excess in legislation will be introduced which would be superfluous, unnecessary and sometimes even un- or counterproductive for Bonairian society. The Dutch model will indeed have to be adapted to the Bonairian reality but this would be more by way of exception. Bonairian reality will not have center stage. The question of what Bonaire really needs then moves to the background. The question in case of integration will be more specifically: how do we fit Bonaire into the Dutch system? Although this sounds very technical, it is now already clear that it has very practical consequences in the practice of governance. Notice how one has to wriggle in all directions to fit Bonaire into the system of the Municipality Act. And then I am not even mentioning the fiscal legislation.

¹² See Note by the report Wolbes. Page 11 and 12: “In The Netherlands is the decentralized unitary state the governmental starting point... In the Netherlands Antilles the island territories have a larger degree of independence.”

¹³ See Note by the Report WolBes, page 17: “It is...the idea that the islands join the Dutch State establishment in a sustainable way but subject to their eventual wish for complete independence.”

There is more. It has to be pointed out in favour of the integration-option that if after having been integrated within the Netherlands the Dutch decided to treat the citizens of the BES-islands less equal than those citizens deemed just, the door for ensuring equal rights would not necessarily be closed. The Dutch citizens of Bonaire as an integrated BES-island will probably eventually seek enforcement of that broader equality, even against the will of The Netherlands, through legal procedures or such. Being part of The Netherlands provides the legal basis to approach both national as well as international courts whereby it would be possible to invoke both the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights and the principles enshrined in those instruments regarding the principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination (the principle of equality as it is enshrined in the Dutch Constitution is less important in this context given the fact that the same Constitution forbids the courts to judicially review statutes; this review is in the Dutch system only reserved for the Dutch politicians, an anachronism to which one has still not found a way to break away from.)

This is, therefore, a point in favour of the integration-option, which does not mean, however, that in case Bonaire would obtain a “country-minus” status The Netherlands could renege on all its responsibilities in this area. In that scenario also The Netherlands would surely have to guarantee a minimum level of financial security although it could not be required to do more than that. I must warn, though, that it is by no means certain or even to be expected that in the event Bonaire would eventually be integrated as ‘openbaar lichaam’, The Netherlands will grant full equal rights to the Bonairian people without a fight. It would appear that one should be prepared for a long and expensive legal battle to obtain such rights. Furthermore, there is, of course, no guarantee that the desired result will indeed be achieved.

On the other hand, it is clear that if Bonaire obtains a “country-minus” status it could largely preserve, subject to minor adjustments, the current (Dutch Antillean) legislation. Not temporarily, as with the integration model, but for as long as Bonaire wishes. In the event Bonaire wishes to make adjustments to the legislation or introduce new legislation it can do so itself, with or without The Netherlands. Thus there is some guarantee that Bonaire’s legislation will be molded in such manner as to ensure that the interests of Bonaire will be paramount. If and to the extent Bonaire wishes to preserve, for example, the existing marriage legislation it can just do that, *inter alia*, because that particular legislation is not in conflict with the relevant human right treaties. That this legislation differs from the Dutch legislation is of no importance because the latter is not the measuring stick in the quasi-federal structure of the Kingdom. On the other hand, it is clear that The Netherlands, be it through the “governor,” will be able to exercise a guiding influence on the legislative process whereby, for example, (very often) rather complicated legislation necessary for the implementation of international treaties that also apply to Bonaire, can be introduced quite easily (although always in cooperation with the Bonairian government).

I notice in this context moreover that such a construct has also major benefits for The Netherlands. Although in such a case The Netherlands would have less ‘say’ in Bonaire than if the latter were part of The Netherlands, those parts of the legislation and those forms of supervision that really do matter could reasonably be pursued and realized by the Netherlands. The latter will thus be relieved from the tiresome task of constantly having to review the complete Dutch legislation to assess whether any part of that legislation should or should not be in force in the BES-islands, or in any event in Bonaire. Moreover, many constitutional puzzles

and brainteasers¹⁴ can thus be avoided. This is, however, submitted as an aside.

I would like to note the following concerning the criteria for participation in the referendum. I agree in principle with the criteria expressed in the majority's point of view. I do, however, also agree with the minority's standpoint that it is somewhat remarkable, not to say absurd, that the Lt. Governor who, as far as I am aware, was born in Bonaire, and with him, other recently returned 'full-fledged' Bonairians, as a consequence of these criteria, would not have the right to vote. I would think that this unfortunate situation could be resolved simply by stating that the requirement of residency in Bonaire for five consecutive years 50 days before the referendum does not apply to Dutch nationals who were born in Bonaire. In that manner the right to vote in the referendum would be secured for all Bonairians, in any event for those Dutch nationals born in Bonaire and residing in Bonaire 50 days before the referendum. I realize that this does not encompass all Bonairians (eg children of Bonairian parents who were born elsewhere, for example in the hospital in Curaçao, but who have otherwise been raised in Bonaire) but one has to remain practical.

We now come to deal with the date of the referendum. In the current situation, none of the three dates mentioned are ideal. The date in March is indeed the most appropriate but it would seem unfortunate to wait that long. Everybody should know as soon as possible what is going to happen. On the other hand, as time passes it will become clearer what the exact content of the integration-option is going to be whereas the alternative of a proper status 'sui generis' can be worked out further. A lot will depend on the position The Netherlands is going to take. Again: the option for a proper status 'sui generis' as a distinct form of political status or a

¹⁴ I can point in this context, inter alia to the in my view very sensible remarks by mr H.G. Hoogers in his article "*The BES-islands, The Constitution and the European Law. About Constitutional and European legislative consequences for the maintenance of the LGO-status of the BES-islands,*" in the *RegelMaat* 2009 (24)1

‘sui generis’ form of “free association” cannot be blocked by The Netherlands if the people of Bonaire freely and duly informed about the alternatives, should vote for such a status. The Netherlands will in that case have to sit at the table with Bonaire to work out one or the other in a reasonable fashion and in a spirit of good will. It would be indeed appropriate if The Netherlands could bring itself to recognize this in advance and if it could indicate before the referendum what would be the parameters within which this constitutional concept could perhaps be given form. But one cannot, I am afraid, presume that the politicians in The Hague will see the light in respect of this any time soon.

The date in December, as presented by the minority of the advisory committee, is in any event not attainable but also the date presented by the majority (seven days before the elections in January 2010) is far from ideal, given the fact that it would be too close to the normal elections and thus could lead to unclear results. After all, the result of any referendum should be entirely independent from affinity with political parties or political leaders and one must avoid the likelihood that these matters are confounded with each other. Another point is of course that the other islands also have to be able to continue with their respective trajectories. I am sorry that I can not shed more light on this particular matter. Much will depend on the political developments on both sides of the Ocean, which cannot be foreseen at the moment. I cannot do other than to wish the Island Council much wisdom when deciding on this point.

I hope the above will be of sufficient assistance to you.

Kind regards,

Signed by Mr. J. Th. Wit

