

# PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY IN THE CARIBBEAN



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## Chapter 4

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# The History of Public Administration in the Dutch Caribbean

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**Abstract:** The term *Dutch Caribbean* refers to the islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands that are located in the Caribbean and their inhabitants. In the pre-colonial era, before the arrival of the Europeans, the islands were inhabited by the Caquetios Indians. The Spanish-sponsored explorers “discovered” both the Leeward (Alonso de Ojeda, 1499) and Windward (Christopher Columbus, 1493) island groups, but Spain founded settlements only on the Leeward Islands. The West India Company made Curaçao into a naval base from 1634 till 1648. The Dutch were the first to colonize

St. Maarten (Dutch: Sint Maarten). The third period is characterized by direct Dutch rule. Slavery was abolished in 1863. A long period of poverty started. The prosperity of Curaçao and that of neighboring Aruba was restored in the early twentieth century with the construction of oil refineries by the Lago company in Aruba and a Dutch–British company (Shell) in Curaçao to serve the newly discovered Venezuelan oil fields. Curaçao developed a diversified economy based on oil, tourism, and the financial sector, and ship repair was another important pillar of the economy. Between 1952 and 1969, the number of jobs at the refinery decreased as a consequence of rationalization. In Curaçao, the tourism phase was started at the beginning of the twentieth century and took off in the 1950s and 1960s, but was temporarily stopped after the events of 1969. In the 1980s, the economy of the Netherlands Antilles slowed down, and between 1983 and 1987, Curaçao was hit especially hard. Aruba's wish for autonomy was granted and Aruba seceded from the Netherlands Antilles on January 1, 1986. Between 1998 and 2000, the number of civil servants on the island government of Curaçao was significantly reduced. The Structural Adjustment Program was too ambitious for the Netherlands Antilles, and a main problem was also that the Dutch government did not honor its part of the deal. Public finances were still weak and the economy was in poor shape.

On October 10, 2010, the Netherlands Antilles was abolished. The Dutch Kingdom currently consists of the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten. Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten are Dutch overseas semi-autonomous entities in the Caribbean, and Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius have become special Dutch municipalities. In the new constitutional structure, Curaçao and St. Maarten have acquired the status of semi-autonomous entities within the Kingdom (comparable Netherlands Antilles and Aruba after 1986). Aruba retains the same status it has had since 1986. Relations with the Netherlands have varied in significance. While the islands have enjoyed a large measure of self-governance in the last century, the former colonial power has often remained important in addressing the financial conditions of these islands.

## Introduction

The term *Dutch Caribbean* refers to the islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands that are located in the Caribbean and their inhabitants. In the past, it also referred to the former Dutch territory Suriname, now the Republic of Suriname, on the northern coast of South America. Public policy and management in the Dutch Caribbean are defined by the relationship with the mother country the Netherlands and the ongoing struggle to redefine this relationship. Curaçao, St. Maarten, and Aruba are semi-autonomous entities within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, while Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba are special municipalities. This chapter discusses only the Dutch islands in the Caribbean and excludes Suriname, which is part of the South American continent.

In the pre-colonial era, before the arrival of the Europeans, the islands were inhabited by the Caquetios Indians. Their center of governance was on the mainland of Venezuela. The impression is that the Indians lived in small groups moving around the islands, that they (i.e., these groups) had some form of governance, which was part of the governance system of the Indians on the mainland, and that they commuted with some frequency. There was a cacique (chief or leader) on the island. They communicated via messages and visited by canoe. Hartog (1988) claims that in Aruba, the Indians left a mark on the population and society. The Indians left no visible influence on public policy and management of these islands (Hartog 1988; Dalhuisen et al. 1997; Römer 1998; Gibbes et al. 1999: 21).

The Spanish-sponsored explorers "discovered" both the Leeward (Alonso de Ojeda 1499) and Windward (Christopher Columbus 1493) island groups, but Spain founded settlements only on the Leeward Islands. Curaçao developed from a cattle ranch to a naval base (1499–1648) (Rupert 1999). In 1513, all 2000 Indians from Curaçao were deported to Hispaniola, Santo Domingo; the same happened in Aruba. It was only in 1526 that Curaçao became part of the public governance of Spain; Curaçao became an *encomienda* (settlement). Ranches were also established in Aruba and Bonaire, and some 33 Indians were brought back to Aruba to work on the range. The Spaniards governed the islands and a governor was appointed. Later, Curaçao was governed from Santo Domingo and subsequently from Caracas. Christianizing the Indians was important to the Spanish (Gibbes et al. 1999: 34–35). Generally, the Spaniards left no trace on the public administration of the Dutch Caribbean, even though Curaçao was under Spanish influence for 107 years. Latin influences on the society are of a later date reflecting trade with the mainland of South America (Hartog 1988; Römer 1998; Gibbes et al. 1999: 21).

## The Early Colonial Era

### *First Period (1634–1688)*

On April 6, 1634, the board of the West India Company (WIC) decided to try to conquer Curaçao (Dalhuisen et al. 1997; Gibbes et al. 1999: 38). Consequently, Curaçao was conquered in 1634 by the WIC and was used as military outpost and trade base. The island was a strategically important base for naval advances against the Spanish and later as the center of the Caribbean slave trade. When Johannes van Walbeeck of the WIC and his 400 men arrived in Curaçao, they encountered a Spanish mayor, 32 Spaniards, including 12 children and 400 Indians. In 1639, van Walbeeck was appointed the first governor. When the WIC arrived, there was a minimum of Spanish public administration, and the core task of the WIC was installing rule of law and defense of the island (Buddingh 1994; Dalhuisen et al. 1997; Römer 1998; Gibbes et al. 1999: 38).

The WIC made Curaçao into a naval base from 1634 till 1648. The construction of Fort Amsterdam was started in 1634 with the goal of defending the island and accommodating the director of the WIC, the employees of the WIC, and a few Dutch colonists in Punda (The heart of Willemstad, Curaçao). Apart from the director's residence and the house employee accommodations, only a few warehouses and one church were built (Buddingh 1994). The WIC decided to colonize the island in 1650. It became a safe haven for trade where ships could store food and water. The island developed into a stepping-stone to the Americas. The Dutch captured Bonaire and Aruba in 1636, which were only scarcely inhabited by the Indians. Aruba became a granary for the WIC until 1791, when the Dutch government reclaimed control from WIC. Columbus was the first to sight Saba, but the Dutch were the first to colonize the island in 1640 by a party sent from St. Eustatius. Because of its difficult terrain, the island's growth progressed slowly and it remains the least populated island in the Dutch Kingdom.

The Dutch were the first to colonize St. Maarten (Sint Maarten) in 1631, but within 2 years the Spanish invaded. The Dutch made a failing attempt to regain the island in 1644, but 4 years later the Spaniards abandoned the island on their own accord. In 1648, the island of St. Maarten was divided between the Dutch and the French; however, complete control of the island was seized numerous times in a series of conflicts. The British became involved as well, taking power for a 6- and 10-year stint. Finally, in 1817, the current partition line between Dutch and French was established. The island flourished under a slave-based plantation



economy and the export of salt until the official abolition of slavery in 1863. The French side abolished slavery in 1848.

These early occupations were part of larger strategies of Dutch trading companies and geopolitical efforts that involved competition with Spain and Portugal. The WIC was organized similarly to the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) (VOC). The WIC was created in 1621, and the charter was set to last 24 years. Like the VOC, the WIC had five offices, called chambers (*kamers*), in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Hoorn, Middelburg, and Groningen, which contributed to the company. The board consisted of 19 members, known as the "Heeren XIX" (the Lords Nineteen). Funding was arranged in 1623, after several bidders were put under pressure; the States General (*Staten Generaal*, or Parliament) of the Netherlands and the VOC pledged 1 million guilders in the form of capital and subsidy. Unlike the VOC, the WIC had no right to deploy military troops, but when the Twelve Years' Truce in 1621 was over, the Republic had a free hand to re-wage war with Spain. A "grand design" (*Groot Desseyn*) was devised to seize the Portuguese colonies in Africa and the Americas (Brazil), in order to dominate the sugar and slave trade. When this plan largely failed, privateering became one of the major goals of the WIC. The arming of merchant ships with guns and soldiers to defend themselves against Spanish ships was of great importance, and almost all ships in 1623 had 40–50 soldiers on board. In the early beginning, privateering was the most profitable activity of the WIC. In 1628, Piet Hein hijacked the Spanish treasure fleet which, in today's currency, is valued at 100 trillion Euros.

The company was initially relatively successful; in the 1620s and 1630s, many trade posts or colonies were established. In 1629, the WIC gave permission to a number of investors in New Netherlands to found "patroonship," a neo-feudal system, where patrons were allowed considerable powers to control the overseas colonies. Settlements included the New Netherlands area (including present-day New York, Connecticut, Delaware, and New Jersey), and several islands in the Caribbean and on the South American coast (including Berbice Suriname, and Guyana). In Africa, posts were established on the Gold Coast (now Ghana), the Slave Coast (now Benin), and briefly in Angola. African settlements traded slaves mainly destined for the plantations on the Antilles and Suriname.

From the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the group of islands consisted of six undisputedly Dutch islands: Curaçao (settled in 1634), Aruba (settled in 1636), Bonaire (settled in 1636), St. Eustatius (settled in 1636), Saba (settled in 1640), and St. Maarten (settled in 1648). Before that, Anguilla (1631–1650), the present-day British Virgin Islands (1612–1672), St. Croix, and Tobago had also been Dutch.

## **Second Period (1648–1791)**

In 1648, after the signing of the Peace of Munster, the Netherlands obtained their independence from Spain, and as a consequence, Curaçao lost its relevance as a naval base. Slave trade started slowly but really took off in 1662, when the Dutch attained the *Asiento*, and lasted till 1791. The island was mainly used for transshipment (Gibbes et al. 1999: 42–50). From 1634 through 1654, Curaçao was governed in accordance with a rule (*Reglement*) of 1629 (Gibbes et al. 1999: 52), and in 1634, a tax system was introduced (Metry 2006: 45). The islands were governed by a director appointed by the Heeren XIX of the WIC with the approval of the States General.

The director resorted under a board in Brazil (Novo Holanda), but when Brazil was lost in 1654, this entity was moved to New Netherlands, where Peter Stuyvesant was appointed director in 1654. Curaçao was ruled by a vice-director (Boxer 1993; Gibbes et al. 1999: 52–53). When New Netherlands was traded with the British in 1664 for Suriname, the Leeward Islands were governed

by an entity consisting of a director, assisted by a board of WIC servants, the commissioner of slave trade, a captain lieutenant of the army, and some citizens. The board was appointed by the Heeren X.\* In theory, the WIC dominated the governance of the islands. However, in practice the colonizers, who were Dutch citizens, took land and the WIC could not do much about it (Dalhuisen et al. 1997; Metry 2006). When the WIC could not repay its debts in 1674, the company was declared bankrupt. However, because of high demand for trade with the West (mainly slave trade), and the fact that many colonies still existed, it was decided to establish the Second Chartered West India Company (called, New West India Company) in 1675.† Curaçao was ruled in accordance with an instruction to the director established by the Heeren X between 1674 and the end of the nineteenth century (Gibbes et al. 1999: 54).

Although all ships, fortresses, and so forth were taken over by the new company, the second WIC lost the monopoly on the slave trade after 1730. Curaçao became a free port, attractive for colonization, and positioned itself as a regional port. As a consequence, Punda soon became overcrowded. It was inhabited by employees of the WIC, troops, traders, plantation owners, seamen, and skilled laborers (Buddingh 1994). In 1776, St. Eustatius saluted the Andrew Dorea of the United States and recognized the United States as an independent nation. This act was punished by Britain in 1781 by bombarding the island; only in 1815 did it return to Dutch hands (Sluis 2004: 24). After the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–1784), it became apparent that the Dutch West India Company was no longer capable of defending its own colonies, as St. Eustatius, Berbice, Essequibo, Demerara, near Suriname, and some forts on the Dutch Gold Coast were rapidly taken by rivals England and France. On May 27, 1791, the Second WIC was declared bankrupt and the director and commanders of the islands were informed and they immediately resorted under the States General, which still influences public administration today (Metry 2006: 34).

In short, the Dutch Antilles were governed by the WIC from 1634 to 1791. In 1791, the company's stock was bought by the Dutch government. On January 1, 1792, all territories previously held by the WIC reverted to the rule of the States General (*Staten Generaal*, or Parliament) of the Dutch Republic.

### Third Period (1795–1914)

The third period is characterized by direct Dutch rule. In 1795, the Netherlands became the French Batavian Republic and most of the Dutch colonies were seized by the English. The ideals of the French revolution reached the islands and inspired rebellion of slaves. The segmented society of Curaçao was ruled by a governor assisted by the Colonial Council. The governor and the troops lived and worked in Punda, Fort Amsterdam. Punda was the living place of the whites and Jews. In 1789, the population was 19,544: 2,469 white protestants, 1,495 Jews, 2,776 colored, 12,804 slaves. There were 1,067 houses. Besides the Punda district, there were two other districts consisting of 200 plantations. In 1795, approximately 2,000 slaves rebelled demanding the abolishment of slavery just like France did in 1794. At the time, the Netherlands was occupied by France.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, St. Eustatius became the commercial hub of the north-eastern Caribbean. It earned the nickname "The Golden Rock," based on arms trade related

\* The number of board members was reduced in 1674. XIX and after 1674 by the Heeren X.

† The new WIC had a capital that was slightly more than 6 million guilders around 1679, which was largely supplied by the Amsterdam Chamber. This new company had the same trade area as the first. The number of directors was reduced from 19 to 10, and the number of governors from 74 to 50.

to the war of independence of the United States. This invoked the envy of the French and English, who from 1781 on made sure the island lost that position by occupying the island and ruining it—the French through their taxes and the English by closing the island off and diverting all trade to their own islands.

In 1815, the Kingdom of the Netherlands was declared. From 1815 (*Regeringsreglement 1815*) onward, Curaçao and Dependencies (*Curaçao en onderhorigen*) formed a colony of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, resorting directly under the King, who appointed a minister of trade and colonies as his advisor. In 1815, three colonies were created: Suriname, Curaçao, and Dependencies, and the three Windward Islands: St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba. The islands were not profitable, and in 1828, the three colonies were merged and governed from Suriname. A Central Bank of Curaçao was also created by King Willem I as part of his vision to develop the economy of these colonies (Tromp 2005; Metry 2006). Due to the geographical distance, this structure did not work. In 1845, the colony of Curaçao was established, the predecessor Netherlands Antilles, bringing the six islands together in one structure for the first time.

In 1848, the Dutch constitution changed and the King had to respond to the States General. The minister of colonial affairs now reported directly to the Parliament. At the highest level, a governor was appointed as the representative of the King and the local population had no say in matters. He created a budget, and for budget deficits, he could go to the Netherlands. The governor is represented on the other five islands by a *Gezaghebber* (lieutenant governor) (Gibbes et al. 1999: 73; Van Beurden 2012). The governor had two advisory organs, constituted by Dutch civil servants and representatives of the local elite. The board gave little attention to the other five islands, which led to resistance against the government center in Curaçao (Gibbes et al. 1999: 73).

It was clear during this period that slavery would end some day; slavery was abolished in 1863. The Catholic Church became responsible for educating the slaves for freedom. At that time, the population of Curaçao was about 23,000, consisting of approximately 10,000 slaves, 10,000 free colored slaves, and 3,000 whites. By 1895, the population was about 27,000, including 4,000 whites of which 2,500 protestants and 1,500 Jews, as well as 23,500 blacks and colored, all Catholic (Chumaceiro 1894). The slaves were free but poor (Rupert 1999). The Catholics were the first to care for the well-being of the slaves, and the church would become a significant actor(s) in politics. The abolishment of slavery can be considered as economic emancipation, followed by political and cultural emancipation in the 1960s.

Based on the work of Abraham Mendes Chumaceiro, a lawyer, one gets an impression that the society was well governed and that institutions were functioning. The court was functioning on a high level (Coomans and Coomans-Eustatia 1998). However, the islands were also hit hard by the abolition of slavery in 1863, and the public finances of the colony were in terrible shape from 1867 to 1918. Only from 1883 until 1894 was there a surplus, thanks to phosphate mining in Aruba,\* but by the early 1900s, the islands were again going through hardship. The population of Curaçao in the early 1900s was approximately 30,000, of Bonaire about 4,700, and of St. Maarten about 4,300. By 1919, about half of the males left Curaçao to work in the region (Van Beurden 2012). Generally, the population of the islands was decreasing, and the Netherlands had to subsidize the islands. The total annual deficit was more than 5 million guilders at the time, which was considered a burden by the Netherlands, but the Netherlands also felt the responsibility to develop the economy of the islands (Hartog 1988; Van Kol 1901; Schiltkamp 1999; Van Galen 2004).

\* Aruba Phosphate Company operated from 1879 till 1914 (Hartog 1988).

## The Oil Era and Industrialization (1915–1960)

The prosperity of Curaçao and that of neighboring Aruba was restored in the early twentieth century with the construction of oil refineries by the Lago company in Aruba and a Dutch–British company (Shell) in Curaçao to serve the newly discovered Venezuelan oil fields. With the arrival of oil, the population expanded rapidly. The oil era started in 1915, one year after the opening of the Panama Canal, and went into decline in the 1950s and 1960s. The refinery in Curaçao became operational in 1918 (Van Soest 1977; Gibbes et al. 1999: 135; Van Galen 2004). The refinery in Aruba started operating in 1928 (Dalhuisen et al. 1997). The industrial work ethic was imported and enforced upon a feudal society. The islands went from the prior period to this oil age in an extremely short period. The refineries brought prosperity to the islands.

These developments intensified the interest of the Dutch for the island as never before. The island was “Dutchinalized” (Sluis 2004: 97). This was manifested in the civil service, education system, and the growth of the churches. Before the arrival of the Dutch, the civil service was kept remarkably small to keep the cost low. As the refinery established, the civil service started to grow too, but at first it did not develop into an instrument to drive the economy and develop society. It seemed mainly to be registering data, keeping files, and making investments in the physical infrastructure (Van Soest 1977: 612–614). The policy was aimed at enabling the refinery in its operations. The number of civil servants grew from 130 to a 1,000 as soon as the oil activities started, and from time to time the whole apparatus was overhauled and expanded (Korthals Altes 1999: 29, 70). Dutch civil servants came over to support the governor, while others came to work for the refinery. This brought tension between the newcomers and the local (white protestant) elite. These developments took place in Aruba as well. However, Aruba had an American refinery Lago that started in 1924 which “Americanized” and industrialized Aruba’s society. As a result, animosity was directed away from the island, toward the government center in Curaçao. The Aruba population grew from 8,200 in 1920 to 51,000 in 1950 (Hartog 1988; Sluis 2004: 64).

In education, the teachers were introduced into the system created by the Catholic Church and provided by frères and nuns. Education was provided by frères and nuns. In education, the native Papiamentu language was pushed out in favor of the Dutch language. The police force and military grew and were dominated by the Dutch, especially after 1929 when a Venezuelan rebel took the governor’s palace (Dalhuisen et al. 1997; Van Galen 2012). The population of Curaçao grew from 33,677 to 67,317. Curaçao became financially independent (Van Galen 2004), whereas in 1918, the budget was for 49% subsidized, and until 1923, the Netherlands subsidized the budget with 12 million guilders\* annually. The government administered the money well, and after 1923, the island could start paying back its debt (Van Soest 1977: 612–614). By 1928, it no longer had a deficit. The islands would feel the consequences of the stock market crash in 1929, but in 1936 Curaçao was back on track. Social policies, education, and public housing were developed; roads were being constructed. The civil service continued to expand (Römer 1998).

In 1936, the islands were coming out of the economic crisis. This gave confidence to the population and in Aruba desire to be autonomous from Curaçao (Hartog 1988; Sluis 2004: 73). Though regulation (*Regeringregelment* 1865) was replaced by a constitution (*Curaçaosche Staatsregeling*) in 1937, changes to the government structure remained superficial, and Curaçao continued to be ruled as a colony. The colonial power introduced a limited form of the right to vote.

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\* In 1940, following the German occupation of the Netherlands, the link to the Dutch currency was broken, with a peg to the US dollar of 1.88585 guilders = 1 dollar established. The peg was adjusted to 1.79 guilders = 1 dollar in 1971 (<http://www.centralbank.an/faq>).



The *Staten* (Parliament) was created, but its power was limited. The *Staten* consisted of 15 members: 10 were elected and 5 appointed by the governor, and one of the appointed members represented the refinery. Only 3.5% of the population had the right to vote. Two political parties were created. The small islands had a minimum of representation in the *Staten*.

The war in Europe and prosperity in the colonies fed the desire in the Dutch Antilles to become autonomous. On December 15, 1954, the Netherlands Antilles, Suriname, and the Netherlands acceded as equal partners to an overarching Kingdom of the Netherlands as established in the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. A double layer of government was created: the central government and the island government. Curaçao became (remained) the dominant island of the Netherlands Antilles. The federal government was seated in Willemstad, Curaçao. With this move, the United Nations deemed decolonization of the territory complete and removed it from the United Nations' list of non-self-governing territories. This was intended to be the closure of the colonial period (Van Galen 2004). After 1954, the King became the symbol of unity of the Kingdom.

## After the Oil Era

### *The 1960s: Rebellion*

By now, Curaçao had a diversified economy based on oil, cruise tourism, and the financial sector, and ship repair was another important pillar of the economy. Between 1952 and 1969, the number of jobs at the refinery decreased as a consequence of rationalization (Van Galen 2004). Financial aid determined the relationship between the Netherlands Antilles and the Netherlands, from 1954 until 1970s. Between 1969 and 1995, the Netherlands Antilles received 3.5 billion Antillean guilders in financial aid. Most of the aid was invested in infrastructure that the countries could not maintain independently. Also, productive sectors were not sufficiently developed, and education lacked adequate investments (Oostindie and Klinkers 2001; Sluis 2004: 86; Van Galen 2004). From 1969 until 1995, Curaçao received one of the highest amounts of aid per capita in the world, but still one-third of the population was living in the Netherlands (Haan 1999: 217). The aid was based on a 5-year program starting in 1960. The aid was partially a gift and partially a loan (Van Galen 2004: 120). It became another mechanism for the islands to accumulate debt.

Between 1962 and 1966, more social laws were approved by the Parliament (Reinders 1993), and in the late 1960s, government entities were corporatized. The idea was that corporations would have better access to the capital market and be better suited to hire qualified labor, because they could pay higher wages and salaries compared to the government. Later, this would become a governance disaster and a source of patronage, because the structure was not transparent and politicians and their parties started to use these corporations for political and personal gain.

The Shell refinery continued to be rationalized, and the labor class was disappointed because self-governance had raised expectations, which turned into frustration against the local (white) elite (Schrils 1990; Reinders 1993; Van Galen 2004). Notwithstanding developmental aid from the Netherlands, the poor economy led to labor conflicts and escalated into a revolt on May 30, 1969. Dutch troops came in from the Netherlands to restore order. The revolt changed the landscape of the local political elite. Power shifted from the "white (political) elite," mainly represented by the democratic party (DP), to "black men." There was a brief alliance between the intelligentsia and the labor movement, but the economic elite did not change. The revolt had a political,

economic class and racial connotation, also inspired by global social movements of the 1960s, and led to expansion of the public sector. Political patronage was present and voters after elections were rewarded with a position in government. This resulted in a vast and largely unqualified apparatus, based on organizational principles of the 1930s (Schrils 1990; Reinders 1993; Römer 1995; Korthals Altes 1999; Oostindie 1999; Oostindie and Klinkers 2001). The civil service was too large, politicized, and underqualified (Schrils 1990: 54–55). Many, including the heads of departments, were politically appointed. A consequence was that the ministers (the politicians) did not trust the departments (Schrils 1990: 88–91). While Dutch financial aid was later reduced, the financial position of the islands deteriorated.

Because of these events, the government became highly protective of jobs, and local businesses were protected by government policies. And the Netherlands took an interest in the economic development of the islands (Van Galen 2004). The number of civil servants grew from 7,679 in 1969 to 11,950 in 1984 (Schril 1990: 104). The policy of Antillianization (*Antillianisering*) was started. Locals were being appointed in high positions. Curaçao became exceedingly inward looking and an economic policy based on import substitution was started (Gibbes et al. 1999: 201).

### ***The 1970s: Rebuilding***

In Curaçao, the tourism phase was started at the beginning of the twentieth century and took off in 1950s and 1960s but was temporarily stopped after the events of 1969 (Goede 2008). In 1970, it was apparent that the Dutch aid was not enough to develop the countries. A representative of the Netherlands was stationed in Curaçao to improve the aid process. Still, there was criticism that projects were granted to key Dutch firms, and part of the funds was not even used. In the period 1972–1976, about 400 million guilders were available for developmental projects (Van Galen 2004).

In the 1970s, Curaçao implemented an industrialization policy with the goal to attract industries by providing tax incentives and market protection or production monopolies (Lucia 1999: 279): the import substitution industry (Gibbes et al. 1999). On the other hand, the economy began to globalize. Investments were made in telecommunications; the container harbor and the free zone were started; and the offshore sector was booming.

After Suriname became independent in 1975, pressure was put on the Netherlands Antilles to become independent as well. This situation created uncertainty and led to speculations that Venezuela would claim the islands. A treaty was signed in 1978 establishing the sea borders between Venezuela and the islands; this decreased the tension (Schrils 1990: 227; Reinders 1993: 101 and 133). The Netherlands Antilles did not give in to Dutch pressure. The Netherlands Antilles claimed that they needed a multiyear plan of preparation (Reinders 1993: 115; Van Galen 2004: 81).

In 1974, the university was established, the free zone was created, and women obtained economic rights. The economy was in bad shape and unemployment was high (Reinders 1993: 111 and 135). An interim government was appointed (1979) to deal with urgent matters. Two important matters were the preparation of the restructuring of the civil service and handling the poor governance and corruption in St. Maarten (Reinders 1993: 141). The federal government seated in Curaçao had to play an important role in handling St. Maarten. There was a growing discontent between the islands of the Netherlands Antilles. The other islands, especially Aruba, felt dominated by Curaçao. Curaçao believed that it was subsidizing the other islands (Reinders 1993: 103; Van Galen 2004: 81).

### ***The 1980s: Restructuring***

In the 1980s, the economy of the Netherlands Antilles slowed down, and between 1983 and 1987, Curaçao was hit especially hard (Reinders 1993: 242; Haan 1999: 217). Curaçao had to cope with four shocks: the closing of the refinery, the closing of the dry dock, problems with the Antilliaanse Luchtvaart Maatschappij (ALM) airline, and the shrinking offshore financial sector. On top of this, the Venezuelan Bolivar currency was devaluated, which further affected tourism from Venezuela (Reinders 1993: 193). In Curaçao, the financial services era that had started to grow in the 1960s\* went into decline in the 1980s as a consequence of the termination of the tax treaty with the United States. By the mid-1980s, the budget surplus turned to a deficit. The government's budget fiscal crisis was further worsened when it was required to raise salaries of unwed civil servants by 14% in 1988, as a consequence of an international treaty prohibiting this form of discrimination (Isebia 2009). Tourism had a restart in the late 1980s to boost the economy. This was an important part of the government strategy to restructure the economy of Curaçao. Aruba implemented the same strategy to reverse the effects of the refinery leaving, and it was very successful (Zwart 2013).

In 1983, Aruba's wish for autonomy was granted and Aruba seceded from the Netherlands Antilles on January 1, 1986. While the wish of Aruba to be autonomous dates back to the 1930s, in 1977, 82% of the voters opted for the *status aparte* as a stepping-stone toward independence. Well-known Curaçao politician and prime minister of the Netherlands Antilles Evertsz at that time predicted "6 – 1 = 0," meaning that without Aruba the Netherlands Antilles of five was not sustainable. A "solidarity fund" (*Solidariteitsfonds*) was created to support the small islands, Bonaire, St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba. The fund was funded by Aruba, the Netherlands, and Curaçao (Reinders 1993: 186; Van Galen 2004). Nevertheless, this was not an auspicious beginning for Aruba. 1985 was a disastrous year for Aruba, because in 1984 the Lago oil refinery ceased operations. Public finances were in a bad shape, and an exodus, of one-third of the population to the Netherlands, occurred. When Aruba became autonomous, its debt had already accumulated up to 0.8 billion guilders and kept growing (Van Galen 2004). The population of Aruba was 60,000 and 33% of the workers were unemployed. The government performed a stunning job restructuring the economy by attracting investors in the tourism sector (Reinders 1993; Zwart 2013).

As to the civil service, consensus exists that the civil service was very inefficient and had numerous problems: inappropriate or inadequate job descriptions, too few data about the civil service, inadequate delegation of authority, poor labor conditions, poor work processes, and poor communication. In 1980, a reorganization was started, but with little result, and many more reorganizations would follow (Verthon 1985). Despite the total of 20 billion guilders of aid that had been granted over the years, there was no idea how to develop the islands. Commissions were formed to develop a policy, but with little success; the debt kept growing (Van Galen 2004). The government took over the refinery from Shell for a symbolic sum of one guilder, signing a disclaimer, and rented it to the Venezuelan *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A (PDVSA)*.<sup>†</sup> By 1986, the problems were growing out of proportion. According to Reinders (1993: 241), the Netherlands Antilles employed 8,000 civil servants and Curaçao employed another 5,000 civil servants (total 13,000 civil servants). The working population in 1985 was estimated at 50,000. Castillo (1992)

\* The offshore service was invented by Mr. Smeets. He helped Dutch companies establish themselves in Curaçao just before the Germans invaded the Netherlands in WW II, so as to stay out of the hands of the Germans (Van Beurden 2012).

† The current contract will expire in 2019. Also a solidarity tax of 10% was imposed on all taxpaying citizens in 1985, which was later removed by the new government coalition, replacing it with other measures (Reinders 1993).

stated that Curaçao employed 2,000 unproductive civil servants. The civil service apparatus was seen as "sick," employed too many incompetent civil servants, deadlines were not being met, and politicians intervened directly with appointments and individual cases. In 1986, a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) (*Ekilibrio & Adelanto*) was developed and implemented. Taxes were raised, and the number of civil servants reduced to 9,000. The Dutch assisted financially (Reinders 1993; Gibbes et al. 1999: 224), but the plan was only partially implemented because the government coalition fell during the process.

In 1988 *Privantil*, a privatization program was developed but not implemented (Korthals Altes 1999). In 1985, the Government of Curaçao still employed over 6,000 people. After 1985, the number of civil servants gradually decreased to less than 1,600 by the start of the new millennium. In Curaçao, a New Public Management Program, *Bedrijfsmatige OverheidsNota (BON)* (1989–1990) was implemented, clustering the over thirty agencies in seven logic clusters. Up to that point, all agencies reported to the Executive Council (*Bestuurscollege*) via one of the seven commissioners; there was no logic behind the clustering, only a political logic. The Executive Council, however, did not approve the sector director, which was a threat to the commissioners. The merit of this project was that it created a logical structure and to some extent made it possible to discuss policies and develop solutions more rationally. This program was also only partially implemented because the politicians did not want to delegate much authority to the civil services.

Between 1984 and 1991, the wages in public and private sector were frozen and emigration to the Netherlands was high, which reduced unemployment in Curaçao from 24% to 14%. From there on, unemployment did not drop any further (Haan 1999: 222). After 1989, the policies followed the neoliberal agenda of eliminating protection of local industry and promoting competition, reflecting western policy preferences of the day, as well as outside pressure by the Netherlands and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Gibbes et al. 1999: 223). Finally, as a result of a *coupe d'état* in Suriname in 1980 and the migration of Antillean youth criminals to the Netherlands, the Netherlands changed its mind on the subject of independence of the islands. Also, Aruba was dealing with transnational organized crime, and Washington asked the Netherlands to dedicate more attention to the islands. The emphasis was now placed on development of the islands and not on guiding the islands toward independence (Van Galen 2004: 103–112).\*

## The 1990s and Beyond: Crisis and Consultation

Aid from the Netherlands was based on four pillars: sustainable development, good governance, justice, and education. Later, poverty reduction via non-governmental organizations was added. Good governance was put on the global agenda by the World Bank, propagating it as a condition for aid (Verdon 2006). Until 1995, 3.6 billion guilders went to the islands in the form of aid, but there was growing discontent among citizens about the performance of politics and the public administration. In 1996, a study was made of the debt problem of the islands. The debt-to-GDP ratio was 80% (and for Aruba, 40%). In the mid-1990s, the Netherlands asked the IMF to supervise an SAP (Sluis 2004: 100; Van Galen 2004; Tromp 2005). In 1999, the *Commissie Nationale Herstelplan* (Committee on National Recovery) stated that in 10 years' time, the debt of all governments combined had grown from 1.5 to 3.2 billion guilders (Gibbes et al. 1999: 227). The budget

\* The number of consultants hired by government exploded after 1986. In 2000, the government got some grip on the consultancy costs, because the funds to finance them were drying up, but control on consultant costs was never possible.



of Curaçao was showing a structural deficit. The government tried to involve the social partners (unions and employers) in seeking for solutions.

Between 1998 and 2000, the number of civil servants on the Island Government of Curaçao was significantly reduced from 2,700 to 1,600. This was a very traumatic event for the whole community of Curaçao. This was achieved by implementing over the years a SAP alike or variations of such a program\* consisting of the following:

- Stopping the hiring of new civil servants, implemented in 1986 and reinforced October 1, 1999
- Corporatization of government agencies, creating state-owned enterprises and state foundations
- The privatization of state-owned enterprises
- Dismissal of civil servants

In 1991, the Curaçao government started the Department of Economic Affairs. Up to that moment, economic affairs had been a federal matter; tourism was prioritized (Gibbes et al. 1999: 224). Curaçao was trying to stimulate the economy with public–private partnerships to build the World Trade Center and Hotel Sonesta. The Curaçao Action Group had developed downtown and stimulated cruise tourism. A program of social investments was created to cope with the consequences of the other aspects of the SAP, was implemented too late, and had insufficient resources to effectively soften the social negative effects. This led to emigration, poverty, and other social issues on the island. The island was battered by drug trafficking, with transshipment from Colombia to Europe. Crime became a big issue, and with aid from the Netherlands, a new prison was built. In the late 1990s, consultants introduced the concept of e-government but this has never been seriously implemented.

As part of the SAP in 1999, civil service was restructured and civil servants were dismissed. The government structure of the Netherlands Antilles, including the number of civil servants, was enshrined in a law (*Landsverordening Overheidsorganisatie Land Nederlandse Antillen, LOL*). By law it was now mandatory to publish the number of civil servants monthly, but this did not happen (Nauta and Goede 2007).

By 1992, things were looking good for Aruba and tourism was booming; from 1989, Aruba had no unemployment. The government employed 7,000 of the 26,000 total employed. Aruba government never really regulated the civil servants apparatus by law (Nauta and Goede 2007). A plan was developed for 1991–1995 to stabilize the developments with a focus on the social agenda, the quality of life. Five hundred and twenty million guilders of government guarantees for the newly built hotels were a threat to the fiscal policy (Reinders 1993).

St. Maarten went through a rather untamed growth since the 1970s. After the autonomy of Aruba, the economic and financial significance of St. Maarten grew within the constellation of the remaining Netherlands Antilles. St. Maarten was heavily affected by corruption and transnational organized crime, and in 1992, the island was placed under higher supervision; Dutch civil servants, employees from judicial systems, and police officers from the Netherlands were sent to the island. In 1995, the island was hit hard by hurricane Luis. However, despite this intervention, the island is still very much affected by transnational organized crime (Reinders 1993: 309–334; Sluis 2004; Van Galen 2004). In 1993, *De Toekomstconferentie* (Futures Conference) was organized to discuss the future of the Kingdom. The Netherlands hoped to settle the in-fighting between the

\* The name of some of the programs were *Nieuw beleid* (New Policy) 1993, *Reinventing Government* 1996, *Kerntaken* (Core Tasks) 1997, *Vision Korsou* 1998, *National Herstel Plan* (National Recovery Plan) 1999, *Nothing will be the same* 1999, *StIP* 2000, and *Nieuwe overheid* (New Government) 2002.

islands once for all, but the conference failed (Korthals Altes 1999: 183). In 1993, a referendum in Curaçao confirmed the place of all islands within the union, despite earlier talks debating the constitutional status of the islands in the early 1990s. Whereas the ruling parties in Curaçao campaigned for the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles, the people voted for a restructuring of the Netherlands Antilles. About 74% of the voters wanted to continue as the Netherlands Antilles and less than 1% considered independence.

### **The 2000s: Radicalization**

The SAP was too ambitious for the Netherlands Antilles and a main problem was also that the Dutch government did not keep up its part of the deal. The public finances were still weak and the economy was in poor shape. While the government of Prime Minister Pourier implemented almost 90% of the program, the Dutch did not provide financial support, as pledged.

In the 2003 local elections, the fight against poverty was, for the first time, a topic put on the political agenda of all political parties (Goede 2008) and has remained on the agenda ever since. The problem could not be ignored any longer. Serious attempts were undertaken to start a *tripartite* platform, but the government and the politicians were reluctant to share power. In 2005, the economy of Curaçao grew by a mere 0.8%. In 2006, the economy grew, but less than in 2005. The implementation of the privatization program was slow. The ALM Airline, which once employed 1,000 people but had only few aircraft, ceased operations in 2004. In 2005, the Island Territory of Curaçao reached a debt of NAf. 2.5 billion (USD 1.4 billion), equivalent to 59% of GDP, while all government combined had a debt-to-GDP ratio of 83%. Although the latest global recession ended in 2000, economic growth still has not recovered and growth rates barely exceeded 1% a year, due to mainly lack of investments. Consequently, the high unemployment rate of about 15% did not show signs of abating and would have grown even higher, if a significant part of the population had not migrated to escape the lack of decent prospects on Curaçao. In addition, youth unemployment reached a high of 37%. A report of the auditor general of The Netherlands Antilles stated that the number of civil servants in Curaçao increased from 1,336 in 2003 to 1,689 in 2006, an increase of about 400 civil servants (26%). This increase took place because the government did not keep to its self-imposed moratorium on hiring civil servants and indicates that patronage is still around. In 2007, the combined civil service apparatus of Curaçao and the Netherlands Antilles employed 3,963 civil servants.

In 2000, the constitutional reform issue arose again. In June 2000, St. Maarten held a non-binding referendum (Beetz and Alberto 2010: 75), in which 69% of the population voted for *status aparte*—independence from the constellation of the Netherlands Antilles but remaining within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Dutch government did not support such a move, based on fears that St. Maarten could not support its own central bank, police force, or larger government, and wished to be involved in all discussions. This became a dominant political issue for St. Maarten and the other islands, thus negotiation began once again.

In April 2005, a referendum was held in Curaçao to determine the constitutional future of the Netherlands Antilles. The result was that the island should become an autonomous part within the Kingdom of the Netherlands and that the federal government of the Netherlands Antilles should be abolished, because it was considered costly and bureaucratic and one of the causes of the social and economic problems of Curaçao. It was seen as a possible measure to reduce government expenditure. Negotiations with the Netherlands on implementation of a new constitutional status were seen as an opportunity to reduce the national debt. The result of the talks was that the Dutch took care of a large part (85%) of the debt in exchange for having more supervision of the budget

cycle of Curaçao, an increased influence on the judicial system, and the aid program would be ended after a short period. This position of the Dutch is a consequence of the fact that the Dutch admit that they are also responsible for the lack of success of the SAP by not having supported Prime Minister Pourier at the time. This led to a division in the society of Curaçao, between those in favor of more supervision by the Dutch to enforce good governance and those in favor of more autonomy for Curaçao and even independence. The consequence was that the target date for realizing the new constitutional status for Curaçao of July 2007 was postponed several times (Brede and Huisden 2012: 11).

Another “status” referendum was held in Curaçao on May 15, 2009 on whether to accept the proposed agreement on becoming an autonomous entity within the Kingdom of the Netherlands as part of the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles. It was approved by a narrow majority of 51.99% of the voters. With the referendum, laws were approved that the Kingdom would supervise Finance and Justice of the Government of Curaçao (the *consensus rijkswetten*). The civil services of Curaçao and the Netherlands Antilles were abolished and a new civil service for Curaçao was created (Brede and Huisden 2012). The new civil service consisted of nine departments. All civil servants were given new positions in one of the nine departments. It was an agreement between the government and the civil service unions that no one would get dismissed. The apparatus would be reduced naturally by people retiring.

The reduction in the core government did not create sufficient restructuring, according to the principles of new public management. Reports of the auditor general of the Netherlands Antilles revealed that human resource processes and financial processes were not under control. But these reports also revealed that funding of semi-governmental organizations and foundations was not based on policy but was ad hoc and not transparent. In other words, the relationship between the principle and the agents is poor. The average age of civil servants is high, as a consequence of hiring freeze of hiring civil servants for a prolonged period. As a consequence, continuity has become an issue, because a large part of the civil service will retire in the coming years. The civil service has hired only a few young professionals who have brought new spirit over the past years. The Anglo-American ideal of governance has not yet been reached. In 2008, a process was created for a new organization of the civil service of Curaçao, and in 2010, the business plan for all departments was ready (Brede and Huisden 2012: 22). At the end of 2013, the minister responsible for the civil service apparatus declared publicly that the attempts to create a new apparatus had failed.

### ***New Directions?***

On October 10, 2010, the Netherlands Antilles was abolished. The Dutch Kingdom currently consists of the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten. Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten are Dutch overseas semi-autonomous entities in the Caribbean, and Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius have become Dutch municipalities.\* In the new constitutional structure, Curaçao and St. Maarten have acquired the status of semi-autonomous entities within the Kingdom (comparable to the now abolished Netherlands Antilles and Aruba after 1986). Aruba retains the same status it has had since 1986. Thus, since October 10, 2010,

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\* The Dutch public bodies of Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba have the power to regulate their own internal affairs. Broadly speaking, central government has taken over the duties performed previously by the Antillean authorities. And the Dutch government has also taken on certain tasks previously the responsibility of the islands, such as management of the fire service. In the short term, the aim is to improve education, public safety, public health, infrastructure, and other facilities and services on the islands.

the Kingdom now consists of four equal partners: Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten are not Dutch overseas dependencies, but full, autonomous partners within the Kingdom, alongside the Netherlands, and each enjoys a degree of internal autonomy. The constitutional changes do not affect the way in which the Kingdom conducts its foreign relations. The Kingdom's external borders have not changed. Foreign relations and defense remain "Kingdom affairs." There is one minister of foreign affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassies, consulates, and permanent representations abroad continue to work for the Kingdom as a whole and all its constituent parts. Like Aruba, the new entities, Curaçao and St. Maarten, have their own government and parliament. Together, these institutions are empowered to enact legislation.

A Financial Supervision Authority has been established for Curaçao and St. Maarten to supervise public finances under the ultimate responsibility of the Council of Ministers for the Kingdom. A similar body has been set up for Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba under the minister responsible for Kingdom Relations. This type of oversight structure will continue to exist in the new constitutional situation. The underlying supervisory principles are a balanced budget, prudent financial management, and a cap on contracting debt.

The existing Joint Court of Justice of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba has become the Joint Court of Justice of Aruba, Curaçao, St. Maarten, and the Caribbean part of the Netherlands (i.e., Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba). The Supreme Court in The Hague remains the court of cessation for the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom.

On January 1, 2011, the US dollar replaced the Antillean guilder in Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba. Curaçao and St. Maarten have a joint central bank. The Caribbean guilder will be introduced as these countries' common currency. Until that time, the Antillean guilder will remain the official currency. The Netherlands is a European Union member state, but Aruba, Curaçao, St. Maarten, and the Caribbean part of the Netherlands (Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba) are not. Instead, they have the status of overseas countries and territories within the European Union. As a result, the islands enjoy a number of advantages regarding import and export.

Curaçao has not done very well socially and economically over the last 20 years. Curaçao partially escaped the global financial crisis of 2008 until 2011. This is attributed to the debt relief by the Netherlands as part of the process of moving toward the constitutional changes of October 2010, but it also illustrates that the local economy is not very integrated with the global economy. While Curaçao's economy did somewhat better in 2006 and 2007, more recent figures from the Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten indicate that the economy came to a halt. Curaçao was hit very hard by the global crisis of 2011 due to bad governance.

On January 1, 2010, Curaçao adopted the Code Corporate Governance. This very modern code structured the governance of state-owned enterprises and government foundations. The ambition was to once and for all create a corporate governance structure that would keep politics in its place and cease patronage that has been the rule for decades. After October 10, 2010, a new coalition stepped in and intervened in the appointment process of the high-ranking civil servants. The new nation was born within a passionate and emotionally divided society with deeply imbedded distrust (Brede and Huisden 2012). The government apparatus is still not functioning properly. Political appointments still occur, and there was a huge budget deficit of 200 million guilders in 2013. Money was pulled from the state-owned companies, and the debt increased with 500 million guilders. And the public prosecutor has started several investigations. There is little economic growth, and decisions on the refinery and the financial services have not been taken. Also the current agreements related to the refinery and the financial service sector will expire in 2019. The government is badly managed. On July 13, 2013, the government of the Kingdom



gave direct instructions to the Government of Curaçao. On May 5, 2013, Helmin Wiels, member of parliament and the political leader of the largest party dominating government at that time, was murdered. Those who pulled the trigger are behind bars, but the intellectual perpetrators are under investigation. On March 7, 2014, the direct instruction by the Kingdom was lifted after the government complied by implementing austerity measures that affected mainly the weak, such as retired citizens.

Between 1987 and 2000, the population of Aruba grew from 60,000 to 100,000. In 1990, the call for independence was off the table (Sluis 2004: 76; Van Galen 2004), and now Aruba is considering an Outer Regions status within the European Union. In 2012, Aruba worked closely with the Netherlands and is implementing an agenda to make the island a global leading green economy. But Aruba has accumulated a huge national debt of almost three billion guilders. The oil refinery Valero left the island in November 2012, leaving 400 persons unemployed. The public debt is worrisome. In July 2014, the Kingdom intervened in Aruba. There is a clear vision on sustainable development and this strategy is implemented consistently.

In 2010, St. Maarten passed a law regulating the organizational structure and the number of civil servants (*Landsverordening Organisatiestructuur* Land St. Maarten, LOL). Many talents from abroad, especially from Curaçao and the Netherlands, have been attracted to the island to work in the government sector. The island is doing surprisingly well, but is still being haunted by corruption scandals, and several of these cases are under investigation. The Kingdom intervened in October 2014.

Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba now form a sort of municipality of the Netherlands. Much has been invested in education and health care, and the quality has risen considerably. The dollar was introduced as the currency replacing the Antillean guilder, which has made the island expensive for locals. The people of the island hoped that the social benefits would get about equal to those in the Netherlands. There is discontent because citizens expected total equality with citizens in the Netherlands but now consider themselves second-class citizens and strangers on their own islands.

## Conclusion

The Dutch Antilles have developed through three distinctive periods: a colonial period characterized by agriculture, trade, and slavery; an industrial period characterized by oil refineries; and the current, post-industrial period that includes oil, tourism, and offshore services. The populations were small. As a consequence, there were many close personal relations, leading to patronage, nepotism, and corruption. It makes holding people accountable difficult. For a large part of the recent past, the civil service has been too big and inefficient; in recent times, it has been cut back, but governance continues to be problematic in many areas, including financial management, economic development, and social policy. Some notable exceptions are seen in Aruba. To some extent, problems are exacerbated by part of the local elites that are seen to spend and take, rather than build and create wealth. They do not invest in the development of the people but blame the former colonizer.

Relations with the Netherlands have varied in significance. While the islands have enjoyed a large measure of self-governance in the last century, the former colonial power has often remained important in addressing the financial conditions of these islands. Many people state that they are still dependent since the Netherlands provide a safety net and extra checks and balances for good governance. Others state that the Dutch hinder the development of the people by keeping responsibility away from them and intervening against their interest and that the islands are less autonomous than before October 10, 2010. At any rate, these small island nations will continue to face

many internal challenges of small nations and external challenges of the economy and, sometimes, nature, while public administration is an important force shaping how well these nations achieve their aims.

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