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The Daily Herald
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Show us we did not get 'old wine in new bottles'

~Were our ministers checked for conflict of interest? ~

Dear Editor,

In your edition of Tuesday, October 19, an article appeared with the heading "Ministers not checked on conflicts of interest."

We were informed that the Intelligence Service did not conduct any investigation into the newly-appointed Curaçao Council of Ministers regarding incompatibility of interests and functions.

Granted, the article was about the ministers of Schotte Cabinet in Curaçao and not about our government, but we really wonder now what happened here in country St. Maarten.

In a Central Government Decree of February 10 guidelines had been mentioned for a screening process partly performed via the Attorney General and by the Intelligence Service (back then the VNA).

If a candidate Minister has no criminal record, or is no suspect in a criminal case and is in no other way involved in

dubious practices, the candidate will pass the test.

The integrity of a candidate minister comes to light in the following process, as described in your article of last Tuesday.

A person is offered the position of Minister by negotiator/prime minister informing the latter in writing which interests he/she has in one or more companies, which additional jobs he/she occupies and which additional activities he/she performs. Reference is also made to Article 35 Section 3 of the Constitution of Country St. Maarten.

He/she also provides data on functions, additional jobs, additional activities and the capital positions of his/her family members, which information is important for a good execution of the future duty.

Lastly, the candidate minister must provide other data regarding his/her personal life and capital position which could be of importance for a

good execution of the future duty and that upon possible publication could bring him/her or the cabinet in an undesired position.

We are interested in knowing what information the candidate ministers gave to the candidate prime minister and what provisions were made to prevent involvement in companies and/or activities so no undesirable conflict of interests can be expected. Did the candidate ministers mention nothing at all, or did the candidate prime minister not have any relevant questions?

If country St. Maarten wants to play in the big league of countries, government should adhere to rules and standards of good governance and integrity of the ministers. A new country is not made by a new name "Country St. Maarten", by labelling our administrators "Ministers", by a one-page coalition agreement or by driving around under police escort.

A new country is made of men/women of integrity, who respect the principles of good governance, who select the most capable people to be our civil servants and who put the general interest above self, who make a solid government plan with a budget on basic needs for a country like a good infrastructure, a good education system, a good health system and the provision of electricity for its population.

Show us by actions that we did not get "old wine in new bottles" on 10-10-10.

Roeland Zwanikken and Rik Bergman, BZSE attorneys at law