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Opinion

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## Plea for immediate institutionalisation of a general auditor's office

Dear Editor,

To me, the upcoming elections look more like a popularity contest or idol competition than anything else. Most popular politicians (probably rightfully) assume that huge (photo shopped) billboards, a degree of excellence in "rhetoric" and "great promises or gifts" are key to winning this popularity contest.

I also have to get used to the fact that several politicians publicly state (at present) that they are "humble" to the people of St. Maarten; this clearly conflicts with my day-to-day experience of "humble" requests of civilians and business owners being typically and at best only responded to at the convenience of the Commissioner in charge. I guess we have no other choice than to enjoy the moment!

What concerns me most is that no political party seems to care what the long-term, economic effects of the various announced "popular" measures will be.

Last Tuesday I attended a very instructive meeting organised by the Board of the SHTA. The SHTA had posed questions to the four contesting political parties. We were informed that, for unknown reasons, only the National Alliance had decided not

to answer the questions posed by the SHTA Board.

Based on the responses of the other three parties, the Board of SHTA had made an overview of the differences, if any, between the programmes of the three political parties that had participated in the survey on the following topics: finance, education, environment, crime, labour, health, planning, maritime affairs, public-private partnership and reform.

Both the DP and CPA had indicated to the Board of the SHTA that they anticipated that — based on the budget plans of the NA/Heyliger coalition

— Country St. Maarten (already) have a 2011 budget deficit in the range of NAf. 90 to 100 million. According to the UP, the Country St. Maarten was facing a "huge and alarming" deficit for the year 2011. As far as I understood, the effects of recently announced "popular measures" by the various political parties were not included in these assessments.

From the meeting it also appeared that none of the parties had really calculated what the economic effects of the various promulgated measures would be in the long term. In addition, it seemed that there was no in-

dependent institute (or at least, not yet) that calculated the long-term effects of the various measures.

In the Netherlands you have an independent institute called the "Algemene Rekenkamer" (General Auditor's Office). So, if a political party in the Netherlands promulgates measures to the effect that, in essence, it intends to play Santa Claus, it can expect a (pretty fast) reaction from this independent institute, whereby the public at large is informed about the long-term effects of such measures.

In other words: the General Auditor's Office is a very efficient "check and balance" of political parties in the interest of the public at large, as no political party likes the idea of being heavily criticised by the sound analysis of the General Auditor's Office.

In the newspapers I read that in particular the National Alliance promises the general public various measures that may seem very attractive at first sight; they concern several tax relief measures and abolishment of assessments of school fees for secondary education.

These "attractive" measures and policies may very well have a very high price tag in the long run. In the end, the cost of running Country St. Maarten will only become higher, and the various announced "attractive measures" will lead to less in-

come for government. So the question is: What are the "unattractive measures" that we can expect in order to compensate for the loss of income that will be the result of the announced "attractive measures"?

Can we, for example, expect a very substantial increase in turnover tax? Or do the political parties contesting this election not bother (or care) about the long-term effects of the announced "attractive" measures and policies, and do they intend to allow the budgetary deficits to only become higher and higher?

In the interests of the (humble) people of St. Maarten, the principles of proper corporate governance and shifting the focus from an idol competition to a serious and responsible government for the Country St. Maarten, I plead that an independent general auditor's office be put in place as soon as possible. This institution could also warrant that reliable data and statistics of government and government-owned companies would become more readily available for public scrutiny.

Which of the political parties will take up the gloves in this respect, and within what term can we expect such an independent institution?

Roland Zwanikken,  
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