

Opinion | Venezuela Exposes a Journalistic Blind Spot — The Kingdom Needs Stronger Caribbean Journalism

The current crisis surrounding Venezuela has exposed a structural weakness in our journalism: the lack of meaningful cooperation between European Dutch media and their Caribbean counterparts. This gap has serious consequences for the quality of news coverage and for democratic oversight within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

In recent weeks, reporting on the Caribbean region has intensified. It began with U.S. airstrikes on boats in the Caribbean Sea and reports of near-collisions in Curaçao's airspace. This was followed by attacks on Venezuela and the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife. The impact of shifting U.S. policy in the region is becoming increasingly visible, including for the islands of the Kingdom.

Under normal circumstances, European Dutch media devote limited attention to the Caribbean part of the Kingdom: Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. But geopolitical developments and sporting success — such as Curaçao's historic qualification for the upcoming World Cup — have suddenly pushed the islands into the spotlight.

Aside from one long-standing correspondent, there are no permanent European Dutch correspondents based in the region. As a result, news organizations are now dispatching reporters to the islands. That attention is important, because the developments are serious and have direct consequences for residents of the Kingdom.

At the same time, this influx of European Dutch journalists exposes a journalistic shortcoming. Much of the coverage lacks local expertise and Caribbean-based sources. Local voices are often limited to brief street interviews — concerned citizens encountered on a beach or in their backyard. Missing are the Caribbean experts, scholars, professionals and journalists who can provide context and depth.

Language is another barrier. Many visiting journalists do not speak Papiamentu, the primary language of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, and often work without interpreters under the assumption that “everyone speaks Dutch.” This forces local voices to express themselves in a second or third language, diluting nuance and precision. Collaboration between European Dutch and Caribbean journalists remains rare.

These are not isolated incidents or the fault of individual reporters. They reflect a broader structural pattern across multiple media outlets.

Journalistic oversight and democracy

On December 11, 2025, a Dutch academic wrote that the Venezuelan crisis exposes a democratic deficit within the Kingdom. Dutch ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs

act on behalf of the autonomous Caribbean countries, yet residents of those countries do not vote in the Dutch parliament that oversees these ministers.

The current situation reveals another layer of that democratic gap. Journalism plays a crucial role in holding power to account. While Caribbean journalists are providing solid local reporting and questioning their own governments, their expertise receives little space in European Dutch media.

At the same time, Caribbean newsrooms operate under significant pressure. With limited budgets and small teams, there is often little room for in-depth reporting or investigative journalism. Expecting these journalists to also scrutinize policy-making in The Hague — where decisions are taken that directly affect the islands — is unrealistic under current conditions.

Cohesion through journalism

European Dutch journalists now reporting on the islands often work independently, despite the presence of Caribbean colleagues who understand the local context, language, sensitivities and networks far better than any visiting reporter.

Scholars and former administrators from the region have argued that the key question is not only how the Kingdom defends itself militarily, but how it maintains cohesion across the ocean. Their answer points to communication and mutual understanding.

That cohesion should not come solely from political or administrative institutions. Journalism has a vital role to play. For that to happen, Caribbean journalists must have the resources to do their work properly. This requires a critical reassessment by news organizations, policymakers and funding bodies — both in Europe and in the Caribbean — of priorities and resource allocation.

In the meantime, an important step can already be taken. Caribbean and European Dutch journalists and editors can work together, share platforms, pool resources and co-produce stories. Journalists themselves can help ensure fairer, more nuanced reporting.

If democracy is to be strengthened across the entire Kingdom, what is needed is not fragmented coverage, but a shared, Kingdom-wide journalistic culture — one that treats Caribbean perspectives not as an afterthought, but as essential.

About the authors: Joëlle Terburg is Managing Director of the Fund for Special Journalistic Projects (Fonds BJP). Wensly Francisco is a journalist, writer, and documentary filmmaker, and serves as an expert on Caribbean affairs and funding programs at the Fund for Special Journalistic Projects (Fonds BJP).