

## **'Entrepreneurship and financing', speech by Chris Buijink, Chairman of the Dutch Banking Association.**

### **At InterExpo Trademission, 24 september 2015, Amsterdam.**

It is a pleasure to speak at this 20<sup>th</sup> Trade Mission. Thx for inviting me again. The Dutch Banking Association, that I chair, unites 80 banks in the Netherlands. All based in the European part of the Netherlands, none based in the Caribbean countries of our Kingdom.

I'm pleased to note that since I spoke at the previous Trade Mission, in Des Indes in The Hague, Qredits has set up shop in the Dutch Caribbean. On August 21st last, Island Governor, gezaghebber, Edison Rijna opened the Qredits branch on Bonaire. Qredits was established six years ago by Dutch banks and the ministry of Economic Affairs. Since then Dutch Insurers have also joined Qredits and last Monday Pim van Ballekom of the European Investment Bank announced a participation of 120 million € in this unique financial institution that offers start-ups and sme's both finance ánd coaching. Through Qredits the Dutch banks are pleased to contribute to the strengthening of entrepreneurship in the Dutch Caribbean. The educational programme "EigenBaas", Be Your Own Boss, a joint effort of Qredits and the local schools on Bonaire, is another important step forward. This programme will encourage students to develop entrepreneurial skills and to consider the possibility of starting their own business after graduating. Qredits responds to the limited funding opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs available on Bonaire, by providing credit up to \$25.000. By providing its clients with e-learnings and physical coaching, Qredits really teams up with them. Coaches are recruited from PUM, the Netherlands Senior Experts foundation, but Qredits will also create its own local Caribbean coaching pool. In the European part of our country, a lot of Qredits coaches are volunteers from banks. I hope we will see that happening on Bonaire also. Qredits steps in when a bank cannot provide a loan, but when the unique combination of finance and coaching doés offer an opportunity to make a project fly. In the European part of the Netherlands, banks are an important gateway for entrepreneurs to Qredits.

It is good to hear that Qredits director Elwin Groenevelt is looking into the possible widening of Qredit's activities to Aruba and I do hope Qredits will also start in Statia and Saba.

Having visited the Dutch Caribbean, Curacao and Sint Maarten, in my years as secretary-general of Economic Affairs I firmly believe in the potential of the Qredits approach for the fostering of entrepreneurship on the isles. In tourism, retail, agriculture and crafts starting entrepreneurs and micro-entreprises can profit from this first financial step combined with the expertise of a trusted coach, a teammate for the entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurs in the Netherlands also need to be entrepreneurial in the search for finance. More and more their projects and growth are powered by a combination of sources of finance. Banks still provide most of it. They have some 140 billion of loans outstanding for sme's; for loans up to € 250.000 the figure is € 15 billion. But new players have entered the field. They may be still small in size, like Crowdfunding, with a volume of now € 150 million, but they're growing. And they can make a difference to get things started. Accountmanagers at the banks see their role evolving to that of a broker, guiding the client in this changing

world of finance. It is important not just to say "No, we will not do this", but "It won't work like this, but maybe, it could work like that".

Last Monday, there was an summit on SME Finance in The Hague. We organized it with our partners from the Netherland's SME Association, Economic Affairs, and the Chamber of Commerce. On this summit minister Henk Kamp launched the Nationale Financieringswijzer, the National Guide to Finance for sme's.; [www.nationalefinancieringswijzer.nl](http://www.nationalefinancieringswijzer.nl), check it out. An online tool to find the right answers for questions on finance and the right partners to provide it, alone or in combination. To create a really national site the partners I mentioned joined forces. A promising development is that the site is customized by business associations in specific sectors and also in regions. It would be worthwhile to explore whether a Dutch Caribbean Extension could be of use. Maybe something to pick up by the Chambers of Commerce on the islands, the local banks and Ministry of Economic Affairs Office on Bonaire.

In the past years a lot of progress has been made in the field of energy, both in securing continuity in supply and in the greening of energyproduction, both in solar and in wind. Just as Bonaire, Saba and Statia will strive to generate at least 25-35% renewable energy in the short term. Aruba has made the greening of the country a top-priority. These actions are an important contribution to the businessclimate in the region.

The creation of an agricultural testside on Bonaire is important as well, especially in relation to cultivation on saline soil.

The cooperation with the people of Foreign Economic Relations of Foreign Affairs and the Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency of Economic Affairs contributes to the further development of the Caribbean Countries in the Kingdom and the Dutch Caribbean as a gateway, a stepping board to Latin America. Ambassador Norbert Braakhuis will speak later on the potential of cooperation with Cuba, now that US-Cuban relations are being redesigned. I remember from conversations in Havana some 15 years ago, the interest there to look for cooperation in the field of tourism for instance through combi-tours. But I could imagine other area's of cooperation like renewable energy where a lot of progress is being made on the islands.

SEO (Foundation for Economic Research) has asked companies in the Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao, Sint Maaarten and the Dutch Caribbean on their experience with Latin America. Barriers are experienced in high import duties in some countries, local requirements and bureaucracy, corruption, and language and culture. Companies that make use of the islands primarily do this because of the available networks of companies, because it is easier to do business in the same timezone and because of the available financial instructure and the good impact of the brand of the Kingdom of the Netherlands both in Europe and the Americas.

The proximity of Latin America makes it easy to invite potential customers to demonstrate Dutch technology. The progress made in the field of renewable energy and sustainability has a special potential in this respect.

Dutch companies are in general satisfied about the services and the facilities on the islands. They would welcome a central spot that provides information about doing business in the

Caribbean. A specific point that cooperations make is the importance of fostering more competition. This would strengthen the business climate on the islands. In this respect the start of a Competition Authority on Curacao is an important step forward. This would be a good area of cooperation in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Things are moving. Progress is being made. Entering the third century of our Kingdom in this digital age where we are all linked 24/7 regardless physical distance, we should intensify our cooperation both private and public to the benefit of the 4 countries of the Kingdom and its peoples. Together we are stronger.

Thank you.