



General Audit Chamber
Algemene Rekenkamer

AUDITING PUBLIC SECTOR TRAVEL AND PARLATINO MEMBERSHIP

ECONOMY
EFFICIENCY
EFFECTIVENESS



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FOREWORD

This audit report examines travel regulations and expenses within the public sector of St. Maarten. The primary objective of this audit is to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, and compliance of travel-related activities to ensure the responsible and transparent use of public funds. By conducting a thorough analysis, we aim to identify areas for improvement in travel planning, decision-making, expense management, and reporting. This will enable the public sector to enhance cost-effectiveness, streamline procedures, and strengthen governance over travel activities.

In our review, we recognize that while travel within the public sector may carry a perception of luxury, it can be a necessary component of government and parliament functioning. However, it is equally important for Members of Parliament, Ministers, and the civil service to adhere to established rules and regulations governing travel expenses. Transparency and accountability are required; public officeholders and civil servants should provide clear justifications for their travel, outlining the necessity and expected benefits to the government and the public. Such explanations increase public trust and ensure that travel is justified and aligned with the best interests of St. Maarten.

We evaluated the effectiveness of Parliament's membership in Parlatino, an intergovernmental organization. Additionally, we identified and reviewed the costliest travel undertaken by a Minister and Government department in fiscal year 2022.

We recommend amending the current regulations and travel policy to require reports justifying in-person travel. Accountability for per diem expenditures, including the return of unused public funds, should be enforced. Implementing these measures ensures transparency and sets an example of prudent financial management.

Parliament, Government, and related entities are strongly encouraged to carefully review this report and adopt the recommendations to foster responsible financial practices.

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SUMMARY

The law states that Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) are entitled to travel first class and receive a per diem. The amount of per diem is based on policy and totals ANG 720 per day, covering hotel costs and incidentals. The Chairperson of Parliament (or Vice Chair), if traveling in the capacity of the Chairperson of Parliament, receives a 1-time ANG 900 for representation costs.¹ However, no accountability is required for allocating and spending the per diem funds for incidentals. The absence of tracking and reporting obligations for expenditures creates an accountability gap, allowing for potential inappropriate spending. There is a risk that unspent and unreturned per diem may be perceived as a money-making scheme.

To address these concerns, we recommend that Ministers and MPs take on the responsibility of monitoring and disclosing their expenses. Although this is not a current requirement based on the law, by providing a detailed account of how public funds are being used, transparency can be improved. Additionally, any unused per diem should be returned promptly, given they remain public funds. These measures will promote accountability and increase the sense of responsibility in using public funds.

Given the precarious financial situation of the Country and our commitment to assess the responsible use of public funds, we believe that opting for business class travel, with its availability and under certain requirements, provides a suitable option; we do not discern a compelling need for first-class travel.

We identified the highest travel expenditures for a single travel for Ministers and civil servants, which we included in our review.

Parlatino (Members of Parliament)

Parlatino, or the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament, is a regional body comprising national parliaments of sovereign and independent Latin American and Caribbean nations. Providing a forum for Member States encourages contact with other parliaments and cooperation among its members.

St. Maarten's Parliament became a member in 2010. The Assembly of Parlatino meets once per year. There are 13 permanent committees within Parlatino whose task is to advise the assembly on political, social, and economic subjects related to Latin America. St. Maarten is represented in all 13 committees. The membership fee is ANG 54,000 per year (total of ANG 702,000 in membership fees to Parlatino). In addition to membership fees, a travel budget is also required.

A survey for MPs aimed to evaluate the value and return on investment in Parlatino. It comprised two parts: one focused on the effectiveness of Parliament's membership, and the other on travel-related activities' efficiency, effectiveness, and compliance. We note that 7 out of 15 MPs responded to the survey assessing the return on investment in Parlatino.

The survey indicates MPs' support for cost optimization in travel, transparency in per diem expenses, and skepticism about Parlatino's effectiveness. There is a consensus among 6 out of 7 MPs to explore alternatives to Parlatino, questioning its cost, language barriers, and lack of evident impact over 13 years.

We conclude that Parlatino encourages collaboration among Latin American and Caribbean nations but faces challenges, including language barriers and resource strain. Shifting to a St. Maarten-centric regional approach can be a more cost-efficient and strategic, enhancing effective communication. However, transitioning may require adaptation, pose legal harmonization challenges, and create uncertainties about parliamentary roles. Alternative regional bodies like CARICOM, ACS, and OECS provide platforms for collaboration in the Caribbean region. We believe the perceived benefits and challenges depend on Parliament's specific circumstances and priorities.

Universal Periodic Review in Geneva (Minister of Justice and support staff)

Due to St. Maarten's role in chairing the Kingdom committee, in-person representation was deemed necessary during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva in September 2022. The delegation comprised the Minister of Justice, the Senior Legal Policy Advisor, and the Department head of Foreign Relations.

¹ Reaction d.d. December 27th, from the Secretary-General of Parliament on the draft report

Additional travel plans included visiting Interpol's Headquarters to strengthen St. Maarten's local Interpol bureau and global law enforcement participation. Interpol reciprocated with a visit in May 2023. Discussions with Louis Vuitton Moët Hennesy aimed to boost anti-counterfeiting. Talks with the Netherlands led to the transfer of 12 long-sentenced inmates, addressing cell capacity issues. The cost of the travel totaled ANG 32,179, with ANG 16,615 spent on plane tickets and ANG 15,564 per diem. Despite our request for a breakdown of costs per destination, the Minister and delegation were unable to provide supporting documents and only offered a general overview of the expenses incurred.

Monaco Yacht Show (Tourism Bureau)

[The Monaco Yacht Show](#) is an annual exhibition featuring various superyachts for charter and purchase. The government collaborated with a private marina in St. Maarten to attend the show and promote St. Maarten as a prominent yachting destination, as they are committed to maintaining a leadership position in this industry. Governments share in the partnership with the marina totaled ANG 14,240 for branding materials, lunches, and event presentations. The invitation extended by a private company to a government department raises concerns about potential conflicts of interest, particularly with the Inspectorate of Maritime being part of the delegation responsible for vessel seaworthiness verification in commercial activities.

Our findings highlight the need for improvement in adhering to established travel procedures and addressing potential conflicts of interest. The effectiveness of allocating approximately ANG 30,000 towards attending the Monaco Yacht Show to achieve the desired objective is uncertain, as there is a lack of a clear strategy supported by economic data for the sector. We were unable to determine the value for money from this travel and what tangible results it achieved.

We recommend ensuring that each trip aligns with an overall plan or project. We also recommend evaluating the availability of statistics or measurable outcomes before committing significant public funds to business travel. Exploring alternative options can contribute to enhanced efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Currently, the coordination in arranging travel leads to inefficiencies and suboptimal fare selections. Centralizing travel bookings for government officials can ensure trips have clear purposes, reduce redundancies, and consistently apply travel policies. A centralized agency can also accrue travel benefits, yielding cost-saving advantages. Additionally, standardizing travel class to economy for everyone, with exceptions based on justifications, would ensure fairness across the public sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Parliament, Ministers, and the civil service, we issue the following recommendations to increase efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability:

1. Draft a national decree containing general concerning the allowance for accommodation expenses and travel insurance for civil servants, as is required by article 72 of the National Ordinance substantive civil servants' law;
2. Ensure that each trip aligns with an overall plan or project and assess the availability of statistics or measurable outcomes before committing public funds to business travel;
3. Require exploring alternative options than in-person travel to contribute to increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness;
4. Make economy class travel the standard, except for justifiable cases and based on (amended) legislation and policy, with business class as the highest class;
5. Split the term "per diem" into "travel and lodging" and "meals & incidentals;"
6. Use internationally recognized standards to calculate the lodging rate and incidentals per country, or, in some cases, per city;
7. Require accountability of the per diem;
8. Require that any amount left unspent, is returned;
9. Require pre- and post-travel reporting for Ministers and Members of Parliament, similar to civil servants, to promote transparency, accountability, and effectiveness (what is the goal of the intended travel, consider options that are most efficient, how to give account for the amounts spent, what are the outcomes of the travel, et cetera);
10. Centralize the booking of flights and accommodation to reduce costs;
11. Clarify justification for per diem increase based on Minister's presence and explain if the travel policy for civil servants remains applicable;
12. Avoid sponsorship-based travel to prevent conflicts of interest and potential institutional bias;
13. Consider discontinuing participation in Parlatino and explore other (regional and more cost-efficient) options.

1. EXPLANATION OF THE AUDIT

1.1 Legal framework

The General Audit Chamber's scope includes auditing government and parliamentary travel for legal compliance and efficiency.² This audit aims to assess adherence to laws and policies and evaluate efficiency and value for expenditures. On September 17, 2022, Parliament (MPs) unanimously accepted a proposal to conduct an independent cost analysis and return on investment audit of Parlatino to the General Audit Chamber in a Public meeting on August 30, 2022.³ The board decided to incorporate the request from Parliament to this audit on travel within the public sector.

1.2 Audit question

The audit seeks to check the legal compliance, effectiveness, and efficiency against the existing rules and policies in 2022. The primary question of the review is:

Were the policies and regulations followed for each business trip, and was there 'value for money'?

1.3 Audit Scope

We received the travel costs within the public sector for 2022 from the Ministry of Finance. The data provided includes all costs booked under the travel and accommodation budget, including for Parliament. We decided to review 1 travel of Parliament (Parlatino), 1 travel from a Minister, and 1 travel within the civil service. Based on this data, we determined the business trips with the highest cost per defined category. This was done by filtering the data from highest to lowest and grouping the data per business trip.⁴ To determine which travel had the highest expenditure, we totaled the airline tickets and the per diem per travel. Per diem includes travel & hotel costs and meals & incidentals.




We identified the highest expenditures for Parliament, Ministers, and civil servants. Credit card charges under the "travel and accommodation" budget were excluded from the sample data due to the inability to verify each expense individually. Our audit has identified three instances of high travel costs in 2022:

1. **PARLIAMENT:** PARLATINO 2022 (BASED ON THE REQUEST FROM PARLIAMENT)
2. **MINISTER:** UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW NOVEMBER 2022 IN GENEVA; MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND DELEGATION
3. **CIVIL SERVICE:** MONACO YACHT SHOW SEPTEMBER 2022 IN MONACO; TOURISM BUREAU

1.4 Assessing value for money

To assess value for money, we applied [Guide 3910](#) of the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions ([ISSAI 300](#)). Figure 1 depicts the criteria for economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Figure 1: Economy, Efficiency, and Effectiveness criteria

 Economy: Minimizing costs	 Efficiency: Value for money	 Effectiveness: Achieving intended goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WERE THE MOST ECONOMICAL OPTIONS CHOSEN? 2. HAS PER DIEM COSTS BEEN KEPT TO A MINIMUM? 3. WERE EFFORTS MADE TO NEGOTIATE THE BEST PRICE? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CAN WE JUSTIFY THE COSTS TO THE TAXPAYERS? 2. ARE ALL ACTIVITIES OR COSTS NECESSARY? 3. ARE ALL THE "NICE TO HAVE" ELEMENTS EXCLUDED? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WHAT CHANGES IS THE TRAVEL SET TO ACHIEVE? 2. DOES THE GAIN JUSTIFY THE PRICE TAG? 3. WILL THE TRAVEL HELP ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES? 4. WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM BENEFITS FROM THE TRAVEL?

1.5 Reading guide

Chapter 2 presents an overview of travel regulations, budgets, and costs in 2022. Chapter 3 focuses on the Minister of Justice's trip to Geneva in November 2022. Chapter 4 discusses the Tourism Bureau's attendance at the Monaco Yacht Show in September 2022. Chapters 5 and 6 examines the effectiveness of Parliament's membership in Parlatino. Chapter 7 concludes with auditee reactions, followed by our epilogue.

² Articles 23 and 30 of the [National Ordinance General Audit Chamber](#).

³ Parliament year 21-22 no.18

⁴ The data provided did not include clear descriptions to easily identify the respective business trips. Hence, we are unable to guarantee this is the full breakdown of the cost per business trip.

2. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF TRAVEL COSTS IN 2022

This chapter provides a general overview of the travel regulations for Parliamentarians, Ministers, and for civil servants. Each actor has different regulations. For the travels with the highest cost per actor in 2022, we audited if the regulations were followed and if there was value for money. In other words, what did the taxpayer receive in return for the travel?

2.1 Total cost of travel based on the unaudited figures of 2022

In 2022, the budgeted amount for travel and accommodation expenses for Parliament and Government was ANG 1.24 million,⁵ representing a significant increase of 162% compared to 2021. This increase follows a reduction in the budget for travel and accommodation in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The budget explanation for 2022 lacks detailed information or explanations regarding these expenses, creating uncertainty about the underlying strategy or policy.

	Budgeted 2022	Actual 2022
Parliament	ANG 652,750	ANG 395,174
Government	ANG 590,906	ANG 1,234,179

Although the Presidium submits the budget for Parliament for the coming year to Government containing a breakdown on expected travel and events, this detailed breakdown is not taken up in the budget of the country.⁶

Data from the finance department indicates that financial entries for government in 2022 totaled ANG 1,23 million and ANG 395,000 for Parliament. Notably, for Government, the unaudited actual expenditures for 2022 exceeded the initially budgeted amount (budget: ANG 590,000) with more than 100% (actuals: 1,23 million).

2.2 National Ordinance on travel and accommodation expenses for MP's

The [National Ordinance regulating travel and accommodation expenses for Members of Parliament](#) is a law which was taken over from the Netherlands Antilles and contains general provisions for when Members of Parliament (herein after: MPs) travel. Figure 2 depicts the highlights from the National Ordinance.

Figure 2: Highlights from the National Ordinance regulating travel and accommodation expenses for MP's



The Governor must be informed of MPs' official travel. The President of Parliament is responsible for the notification. The Clerk to Parliament (Secretary-General) and his staff members are considered equivalent to MPs when traveling as part of the delegation or on behalf of a Parliamentary committee.⁷

2.2.2 Travel Guidelines for Members of Parliament

Parliament has established [guidelines for MP travel](#), aiming for cost-efficiency, timely arrival, and rest, with allowances of € 400,- (or equivalent) for European countries and ANG 720,- (\$400) for others. The President of Parliament receives a one-time additional ANG 900,- for representation costs during travel. MPs are responsible for ticket changes, must return allowances if they do not attend or return early, and delegation size depends on the Parliament's budget and faction representation.

⁵ Including the High Councils of State the amount totals to ANG 1,4 million.

⁶ Reaction d.d. December 27th, from the Secretary-General of Parliament on the draft report

⁷ [Explanatory notes to the National ordinance regulating travel and accommodation expenses for MP's.](#)

2.3 Travel Regulation for Ministers

The [travel and accommodation expenses regulation for the Council of Ministers](#) aligns with provisions granted to MPs allowing first-class travel. According to a decision sheet from the Council of Ministers, a daily per diem of ANG 720,- is granted. Depending on the destination, the per diem can increase to ANG 900,-.⁸

2.4 Accountability on travel expenses by Members of Parliament and Ministers

The regulation does not require MPs or ministers to keep track of their expenses. Ministers are not accountable for how the money is spent or if any unused per diem is reimbursed. This creates:

1. **LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY:** MINISTERS / MPs ARE NOT REQUIRED TO TRACK THEIR EXPENSES, WHICH MEANS THEY DO NOT HAVE TO EXPLAIN HOW THEY SPEND THE MONEY. THIS MAKES IT CHALLENGING TO ENSURE RESPONSIBLE USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS.
2. **POTENTIAL MISUSE OF FUNDS:** WITHOUT TRACKING, THERE IS A RISK THAT THE MONEY IS USED FOR PERSONAL PURPOSES, LEADING TO A RISK OF INAPPROPRIATE SPENDING. PER DIEM LEFT UNSPENT AND UNRETURNED COULD BE SEEN AS A MONEY-MAKING SCHEME.
3. **LIMITED TRANSPARENCY:** THE ABSENCE OF EXPENDITURE TRACKING HINDERS TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT SPENDING, MAKING IT HARDER TO UNDERSTAND HOW TAXPAYER FUNDS ARE UTILIZED.

To address the lack of accountability, we recommend Ministers and MPs be required to track and report their expenses, providing a clear breakdown of how public funds are used. To prevent potential misuse of funds, stricter guidelines should be established, and any unspent per diem should be promptly returned.

2.5 Travel regulation for civil servants

Article 72 of the [National Ordinance Substantive Civil Servants Law](#) is the basis for compensation of business trips for civil servants. The law requires the formulation of specific rules through a national decree. Without this decree, the [2013 travel policy](#) is applied as a temporary measure. After a decade, the legally required national decree has not been drafted. Based on the policy, civil servants are entitled to:

1. A fixed rate of €100 for trips to Europe or \$100 for business trips to the rest of the world;
2. Reimbursement of the actual accommodation costs incurred up to a maximum of €200 per night in Europe and \$200 for overnight stays in the rest of the world.

If no evidence is submitted showing that accommodation costs were incurred, an amount will be reimbursed from \$15 / €15 per night to a maximum of four nights per business trip. The use of a declaration form is mandatory. The form must be submitted with the original supporting documents and a copy of the travel report within one month after the business trip has concluded.

We were unable to ascertain if civil servants traveling with a Minister are still required to comply with the civil servant policy. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, civil servants assume the financial policy of the Ministers in terms of remuneration but are still, in principle, expected to report costs and provide a report of the travel. The enforcement of this is challenging and varies from Ministry to Ministry.⁹

2.6 Efficient use of per diem

Daily per diem is based on fixed amounts. To ensure financial accountability and prevent misappropriation, we recommend following international standards for per diem. These standards involve a comprehensive list of countries and, in some cases, cities, each with assigned daily per diem rates divided into hotel costs and incidentals, with maximum amounts specified in the list. The financial controller should diligently verify that the hotel accommodation rate does not exceed the agreed maximum. If the limit is surpassed, booking the hotel should only proceed after obtaining prior permission.

During our audit we found that in some cases, travel was not confirmed. Waiting to make a final decision often increases ticket and hotel prices significantly. We recommend investigating centralizing the booking process through a specified department to maintain efficiency.

⁸ Beslisblad van de Ministerraad 2022, DIV # 199-11 entitled: "Goedkeuring van de vergoeding van de verblijfskosten van de Ministers voor dienstreizen.

⁹ Reaction from the Department head of Foreign Relations dated August 24, 2023.

Furthermore, we have been made aware that the per diem allowance for civil servants increases when the Minister is present or arrives at the travel destination. From that point onward, civil servants are no longer governed by the provisions of the civil servant policy, but instead fall under the provisions of the Minister's regulation, which permits a higher per diem rate. However, we fail to understand the rationale and justification for this increase based solely on the Minister's presence. It is still uncertain if a travel report that adheres to the travel policy for civil servants is mandatory for civil servants traveling solo, without the presence of the Minister.

2.7 Efficient use of public funds for travel

While Ministers and MPs are entitled to first-class travel, the efficient use of public funds and finding ways to optimize spending should be duly considered. We found a lack of timely coordination in arranging travel leading to inefficiencies and suboptimal fare selections.

The government could achieve several positive outcomes by centralizing the booking process for the travel of Ministers, MPs, and civil servants. These include:

- ENSURING THAT EVERY TRIP IS LINKED TO A CLEAR AND ACCOUNTABLE PURPOSE, IMPROVING VALUE FOR MONEY THROUGH VETTING ALL PROPOSED TRAVEL AGAINST POLICY OBJECTIVES;
- REDUCING OR ELIMINATING REDUNDANCY IN BOOKING EFFORTS, THEREBY REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATING COSTS, AND IMPROVING EFFICIENCY;
- CONSISTENTLY APPLYING TRAVEL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES, ENSURING THE ELIMINATION OF AD-HOC DECISION-MAKING.

With the implementation of a centralized booking agency within the government, the accrual of travel points becomes feasible. This allows for the consolidation of travel benefits and could be used to obtain discounts, upgrades, and other cost-saving benefits, ultimately maximizing government's travel expenditure efficiency.

2.8 Choice of travel class

We identified different travel classes: business, first class, premium economy, and economy class, each tailored to different needs. First class is all about luxury and personalized service, while Business class offers a balance between comfort and affordability. Premium economy provides extra comfort for a lower price, and Economy is usually the cheapest option.

While Ministers and MPs are allowed to travel first class, civil servants are only allowed to travel in economy class unless traveling with the Minister. This rule remains in place even though civil servants often have demanding duties that require efficient travel while maintaining high performance. We suggest a more consistent approach by recommending economy class as the standard for MPs, Ministers, and civil servants alike, ensuring fair treatment in travel options across the public sector. Exceptions, like business class travel, could be considered on a case-by-case basis, contingent on valid justifications such as longer flights and in alignment with amended policy.

We believe that it is important to be responsible with public funds, especially given the current financial situation of the country. Therefore, we see business class travel as a suitable option and do not find any compelling reason to opt for first-class travel.

2.9 Quick scan of the travel regulations on French St. Martin and Curaçao

As part of our review, we analyzed the travel regulations for dignitaries of French St. Martin and Curaçao.

2.9.1 French St. Martin

The President, Director-General, and Chief of Staff have authorization for first-class travel, with Vice Presidents eligible under specific distance-related conditions. Elected officials enjoy premium economy class, while community employees use regular economy. However, policies vary between departments and lack standardized regulation.

Regarding daily allowances, specific rules are in place. Meal allowances are fixed at €17.50 for lunch and dinner, subject to potential destination-based fluctuations. The Collectivity covers hotel costs, inclusive of

breakfast, and fully refunds transportation expenses incurred during official trips. Elected officials receive expense reimbursements without any upfront payments necessary.¹⁰

2.9.2 Curaçao

The travel regulation of Curaçao is similar to the regulation in St. Maarten. However, unlike St. Maarten, First class travel is not permitted in Curacao. Business class is reserved for authorities on flights lasting more than three hours, while economy class is the norm for all other cases.

Curaçao separates the per diem into Travel & Accommodation and Meals & Incidentals. The daily allowance for Meals & Incidentals depends on the destination:

- ST. MAARTEN, ARUBA, BES ISLANDS: \$80 PER DAY.
- EUROPEAN UNION: €110 PER DAY
- REST OF THE WORLD: \$100 PER DAY

For trips to St. Maarten, Aruba, and the BES Islands lasting less than 12 hours, the allowance is half of the specified amounts. If an advance is provided, settlement occurs within 30 days of approval, upon submission of original documents and receipts.¹¹

¹⁰ E-mail of the *Assistante de la directrice de Cabinet*, d.d. August 29th, 2023. The English version in this report is a translation of the French original text. In the case of contradictions or misinterpretations, the French text prevails.

¹¹ Ministry of Finance Curaçao, "AO-procedure Dienstreis, 10/12/2012", including the amendment of paragraph 3.5 of the AO-procedure, and the amended travel policy of January 1st, 2013.

3. MINISTER OF JUSTICE: BUSINESS TRAVEL TO GENEVA, LYON, PARIS, AND THE HAGUE

In this chapter, our focus will be on evaluating the adherence of the Minister of Justice and support staff to the travel and accommodation expenses regulation and the [2013 travel policy](#) during the business trip to Geneva. We conducted an assessment to determine whether there was value for money. To assess *economy, efficiency, and effectiveness*, we applied [Guide 3910 of the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions \(ISSAI 300\)](#).

Annex 1 provides an overview of the questions we asked, to determine value for money.

3.1 Travel itinerary and financial overview

Besides traveling to Geneva, during the same trip, the Minister (and support staff) traveled to Lyon, Paris, and The Hague for business purposes. The cost for the travel totaled ANG 33,020. Table 1 provides a summary of the itinerary, while Table 2 provides a breakdown of the total costs of the trip.

Table 1: Itinerary travel of the Minister of Justice and support staff

Date	Location	Purpose
Nov 13 – 15	Geneva	Attend and Chair the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) convention
Nov 16	Lyon	Courtesy visit to Interpol
Nov 16 – 17	Paris	Anti-counterfeiting meeting with Unifab , and with representatives of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy
Nov 18	The Hague	Meeting Minister of Legal Protection (The Netherlands) on the urgent lack of cell capacity in St. Maarten

Table 2: Overview of the total costs of travel to Geneva, Lyon, Paris, and The Hague

Individual	Plane / train tickets	Per diem
Minister of Justice	ANG 9,904	ANG 5,652
Head of Foreign Relations	ANG 3,575	ANG 5,652
Senior Legal Policy Advisor	ANG 3,977	ANG 4,260
Total	ANG 16,615	ANG 15,564

Despite our request for a breakdown of costs per destination, the Minister and delegation were unable to provide supporting documents and only offered a general overview of the expenses incurred. We note that it is not feasible for the Minister to retroactively provide a detailed overview of per diem expenditures when there is no obligation to provide detailed information on the expenses incurred. We believe this further supports the recommendation of giving an account of how these public funds are spent within a reasonable period.

3.1.1 Per diem expenditures

During the audit, we examined the per diem policy for Ministers and support staff when traveling, which grants them a daily allowance to cover hotel costs and general expenses. The current per diem rate stands at €400 per day, per person. For the specific travel to Geneva, a negotiated special rate for the hotel resulted in a daily increase of €100 to accommodate the costs. We discovered that Ministers are not obligated to maintain records of per diem spending, leading to a lack of accountability for expenditure or the return of unused funds.

Although the Minister and senior legal policy advisor stated in an interview¹² that the per diem was fully utilized with no remaining balance, we were unable to verify this due to the absence of expenditure tracking requirements. These findings raise concerns regarding the lack of transparency and documentation regarding per diem expenditures. It is recommended to establish a clear mechanism for tracking and reporting per diem expenses to ensure accountability.

3.2 Universal Periodic Review in Geneva

From November 13th until November 15th, 2022, the Minister of Justice was Head of the Delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Alongside a member of her staff and the Department Head of Foreign Relations, the Minister engaged in this UN Human Rights Council process. The UPR aims to enhance the protection and promotion of human rights globally through a peer-review system among all 193 UN Member States. See a link to the meeting [here](#).

¹² Interview with the Minister of Justice and the Senior Legal Policy Advisor, d.d. April 26th, 2023.

3.3 Courtesy visit to Interpol in Lyon

On November 16th, 2022, the Minister of Justice and the Senior Legal Policy Advisor visited Interpol headquarters in Lyon. This meeting aimed to strengthen our national Center Bureau (NCB - Interpol St. Maarten) and the collaboration between law enforcement St. Maarten and the Head Quarters of Interpol to discuss topics like Interpol's Strategic Frameworks, ongoing projects to establish Interpol's liaison office in Barbados, Interpol's role in combatting human smuggling and their support to combat firearms trafficking and firearms-related crimes.¹³ As a result, representatives of Interpol visited St. Maarten on a week-long Quality Standard visit, from May 15th until May 19th, 2023, in which strengthening of NCB Philipsburg, as well as possibilities for the use of Interpol products, training courses, and joint law enforcement actions, were tabled.

3.4 Visit to Unifab and Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy

On November 17th, 2022, Minister Richardson and her delegation met with brand executives of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy in Paris to strengthen anti-counterfeiting initiatives. The discussions focused on consumer protection, health, and economic development. During an interview with the Minister of Justice, she indicated that counterfeiting is an important topic in St. Maarten. She advised us to speak to the Head of the Customs Department to better understand the issue's scope.¹⁴

3.4.1 Anti-Counterfeit

On June 23rd, we interviewed the Acting Head of the Customs Department. The current workforce of 33 full-time equivalents (FTE) falls far short of the bare minimum requirement of 66 FTE for basic functioning. This understaffing severely limits customs' capacity to effectively conduct their focus, which is detecting drugs and firearms. According to the interview, drugs and weapons are found weekly.¹⁵ In light of financial and personnel constraints, it becomes evident that customs' ability to operate is far from optimal, let alone regarding locating counterfeit products. The Ministry of Justice notes that this emphasizes why international collaboration and support of brands are of such high importance.¹⁶

3.5 Visit to The Hague to discuss cell capacity

On November 18th, 2022, the Minister of Justice (and support staff) met with the Minister of Legal Protection of The Netherlands to discuss the urgent lack of cell capacity in St. Maarten. They explored potential solutions and initiated discussions between relevant ministries to address the issue. As a result, recently 12 inmates have been transferred to The Netherlands.

3.6 Compliance: were the rules followed?

Two advice requests were drafted for the travel concerning the Minister of Justice (and support staff) to the UPR in Geneva. We note the most important findings from the advice.

1. **DESTINATION:** Except for supporting documents, the travel advice did not explicitly mention all destinations the Minister and support staff visited and excluded a justification for these destinations.
2. **PURPOSE:** The travel advice requests do not explain the purpose of the trips to Lyon, Paris, and The Hague. Also, there was a lack of information regarding the intended results of these visits.
3. **CLARITY ON TRAVEL BASIS:** The travel advice does not clarify whether the support staff traveled according to the Ministerial regulation or civil servant policy. For instance, the travel report was prepared based on the civil servants' travel policy. However, the per diem was calculated using the Ministerial regulation, resulting in a per diem of €500 per day instead of €100 as per civil servant policy.
4. **TIMELINESS OF TRAVEL REPORT:** As per the travel policy for civil servants, a travel report is required to be prepared within one month after returning from the trip. The delegation drafted a travel report after the audit was announced, and an interview was requested.¹⁷

These findings indicate areas for improvement regarding the adherence to the rules and procedures for travel.

Interpol, UPR, brand support for combating anti-counterfeit, and solving the urgent and concerning lack of cell capacity in St. Maarten are all imperative subject matters for the Ministry of Justice. Instead of making four expensive separate work visits, the Minister combined these four subject matters in one visit. A trip to the General Assembly of Interpol in India on its own would have cost more than this 4-in-1 work visit.¹⁸

¹³ Interpol Visit Program St. Maarten from November 16 until November 22, 2022.

¹⁴ Interview with the Minister of Justice dated April 26th, 2023.

¹⁵ Interview with the Act. Head of the Customs Department dated June 23rd, 2023.

¹⁶ Reaction on the Memorandum of Findings dated July 31st, 2023.

¹⁷ Interview with the Minister of Justice dated April 26th, 2023.

¹⁸ Reaction on the Memorandum of Findings dated July 31st, 2023.

4. CIVIL SERVANTS: MONACO YACHT SHOW

In this chapter, our focus is on evaluating the adherence of the Tourism Bureau to the [2013 travel policy](#) during the business trip to a Yacht Show in Monaco in September 2022. We conducted an assessment to determine whether there was value for money. To assess *economy, efficiency and effectiveness* we applied [Guide 3910 of the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions \(ISSAI 300\)](#).

Annex 2 provides an overview of the questions we asked to determine value for money.

4.1 The Monaco Yacht Show 2022

[The Monaco Yacht Show](#) is an annual exhibition showcasing various superyachts available for charter and purchase. Alongside the display of yachts, the event attracts industry professionals, including yacht builders, designers, luxury brands, and brokerage companies. In 2022, the Government collaborated with a private marina in St. Maarten to attend the show and promote St. Maarten as a yachting destination.

The government, together with other stakeholders, formed a partnership to be able to attend the Monaco Yacht Show. The Government's share in the partnership totaled ANG 14,240 for branding materials, lunches, and a presentation at the Yacht Show and was transferred to the private marina. Approximately 46 brokers attended, with the goal of promoting St. Maarten as a yachting hub.

4.2 Travel itinerary and financial overview

The Tourism Bureau attended the Monaco Yacht Show 2022, held on September 28, 2022, through October 1, 2022. The cost for the travel totaled ANG 30,096. The delegation comprised the head of the tourism bureau and a representative from the inspectorate of shipping from Maritime Affairs. Table 3 provides a summary of the itinerary, while Table 4 provides a breakdown of the total costs of the trip.

Table 3: Itinerary travel to the Monaco Yacht Show 2022

Date	Location	Purpose
Sep 25 – Oct 2, 2022	Monaco	To promote St. Maarten as a destination and to gather information on potential opportunities to secure a leadership position in the Yachting sector within region.

Table 4: Overview of the total costs of the travel to the Monaco Yacht Show 2022 (in ANG)

Position	Travel dates	Insurance/transportation	Incidentals	Plane tickets	Hotel costs	Total
Head of Tourism Bureau	Sep 25- Oct 2	ANG 423	ANG 1,440	ANG 3,439	ANG 3,240	ANG 8,542
Shipping Maritime Inspector	Sep 26- Oct 4		ANG 1,080	ANG 4,074	ANG 2,160	ANG 7,314
Payment to private sector						ANG 14,240
Total		ANG 423	ANG 2,520	ANG 7,513	ANG 5,400	ANG 30,096

4.2.1 Per diem expenditures

The per diem rate for European travel is €300 per day, consisting of €100 for incidentals and meals and €200 for accommodation. Due to the location, the per diem varied within the delegation from €300 to €400 per day. The advice supports the higher costs and the decision to stay outside Monaco for cost reduction.

The delegation was unable to provide supporting receipts for accommodation expenses, contrary to the policy's requirement for such documentation. The travel policy specifies that the per diem of €100 per day is allocated for meals and transportation without requiring justification. Although it was claimed that the total per diem was utilized, the absence of expenditure tracking makes it impossible to verify.

This lack of oversight raises concerns about the potential for cautious spending to avoid returning unused per diem funds, which ultimately come from taxpayers' money.

4.3 Compliance: were the rules followed?

An advice request must be drafted to travel, and a travel report with supporting documents must be submitted within one month of returning from the travel. We note the most important findings from the advice and our general compliance check below.

1. **PER DIEM:** The reimbursement for accommodation exceeded the specified limit and received the necessary approval. The delegation received €300 instead of the allowed €200 per overnight stay in Europe. The delegation did consider more cost-effective accommodations on the outskirts of Monaco to reduce expenses.
2. **POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** The invitation extended to a government department by a private company for the Monaco Yacht Show raises concerns about a potential conflict of interest. This situation could create the perception of preferential treatment or benefits, potentially impacting the impartiality of the regulatory system. Notably, the Inspectorate of Maritime, responsible for verifying vessel seaworthiness in commercial activities, was part of the delegation.
3. **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:** It is unclear if a declaration form accompanied by supporting documents was submitted within the required one month following the travel. The travel policy mandates submitting an original declaration form with supporting documents and a travel report for every business trip. Although the travel report was received, the accompanying declaration form and supporting documents were not provided.

These findings indicate areas for improvement regarding the completeness and adherence to the established procedures for travel.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEMBERSHIP IN PARLATINO

In 2022, the Members of Parliament unanimously accepted a proposal from one of the factions, requesting the General Audit Chamber to audit the return on investment of Parliament's membership in Parlatino. In this chapter, we are exploring the effectiveness of Parlatino, including evaluating the adherence of the Members of Parliament to the [travel and accommodation expenses regulation for the Members of Parliament](#) during the business trips for Parlatino.

5.1 Parlatino and St. Maarten

Parlatino, or the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament, is a regional body comprising of national parliaments of sovereign and independent Latin American and Caribbean nations. Providing a forum for Member States encourages contact with other parliaments and cooperation among its members. Parlatino is not a formal decision-making body, and decisions made are non-binding.



It was created in 1964 to promote human rights and economic and social development, maintain and foster relations with other geographic parliaments and international organizations, and defend against imperialism and colonialism.¹⁹

Parliament became a member of Parlatino in 2010 to develop working relationships that would be advantageous for St. Maarten in the long term.²⁰ Membership in Parlatino was seen to reinforce and expand on relationships already built with some countries in Latin America for the promotion of tourism, trade, and commerce. Being part of Parlatino was seen as an opportunity to share and exchange information and experiences.²¹ St. Maarten is represented in all 13 permanent committees of Parlatino.²² This was not always the case until two years ago. St. Maarten was represented in 11 committees previously.²³

In 2017, following the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, Parliament abstained from attending or traveling to Parlatino meetings for at least one year, starting October 24, 2017, until the conclusion of the Parliamentary year (2017-2018). In 2019, the Committee of Parlatino Matters (CPM) convened to discuss the future course of action regarding Parliament's participation in Parlatino. Two proposals were put forth for further consideration.

➤ *PROPOSAL 1:*

The first proposal suggested extending the suspension of travel to Parlatino Meetings, citing a budget deficit and reliance on liquidity funds from the Netherlands to subsidize the budget along with the consideration of travel expenses to Parlatino meetings. This proposal was ultimately voted against.²⁴

➤ *PROPOSAL 2:*

The second proposal advocated for continuing attendance at Parlatino for the remaining year of 2019. The proposal received approval, supported by the fact that the membership fee for that year had already been paid. It also allowed members who had not previously attended Parlatino to participate. The proposal stipulated that all attending members were expected to assess and delineate the benefits for Parliament. The proposal emphasized that the Parlatino Committee should play a more active role in analyzing incoming documents from Parlatino and how these documents can assist in determining the *effectiveness* of Parlatino.

A Permanent Committee for the Parlatino Matters (CPM) was established.²⁵

¹⁹ <https://parlatino.org/>

²⁰ Parliament of Sint Maarten, Annual report 2010- 2011

²¹ <https://pearlradio.sx/2010/11/24/president-of-parliament-says-membership-in-parlatino-has-benefits-for-sint-maarten/>

²² Information received by the Secretary General of Parliament d.d. October 4, 2023

²³ Reaction d.d. December 27th, from the Secretary-General of Parliament on the draft report

²⁴ Proposal no.1 voted 6 for and 7 against. Proposal no.2 voted 7 for and 6 against

²⁵ Parliament of Sint Maarten, Annual report 2019-2020

5.2 Analyzing Parlantino membership

The concrete results coming out of the permanent committee are unclear to us. Despite a thorough examination of the annual reports and information obtained from Parliament, there is a lack of identifiable specific tangible outcomes. The clarity and transparency regarding the committee's activities and the measurable impact of its efforts seem challenging to discern, based on the available documentation and communication from Parliament.

We were not privy to any indication or information in which participation in Parlantino resulted in tangible proposals/outcomes in Parliament.

5.3 How much has been spent on Parlantino to date?

St. Maarten pays an annual membership fee and incurs travel expenses (per diem and tickets) for attending Parlantino assemblies. There could be several Parlantino assemblies each year. For example, in 2022, there were 4 trips for Parlantino, accounting for more than one-third of the travel expenses Parliament incurred in 2022.²⁶

Parliament paid nearly a half million guilders in membership fees for Parlantino and has incurred ANG 2 million in travel-related expenditures for Parlantino since 2010.²⁷ Table 5 depicts the costs per year for membership fees and travel.

Table 5: Overview of the total costs related to Parlantino (in ANG)²⁸

Year	Membership fees	Travel expenses	Year	Membership fees (continued)	Travel expenses (cont)
2010	-	-	2017	ANG 54,000	ANG 165,793
2011	-	ANG 88,189	2018	ANG 54,000	-
2012	ANG 36,000	ANG 484,831	2019	ANG 54,000	ANG 149,565
2013	ANG 36,000	ANG 385,450	2020	ANG 54,000	-
2014	ANG 36,000	ANG 271,158	2021	ANG 50,999	ANG 8,775
2015	ANG 36,000	ANG 236,807	2022	ANG 54,000	ANG 159,111
2016	ANG 54,000	ANG 192,856			
Total				ANG 518,999	ANG 2,142,535

5.4 Economy, Efficiency, and Effectiveness of Parlantino membership and travel in general

To determine the “value for money” of Parliament’s participation in Parlantino, we applied the principles of *economy, efficiency, and effectiveness*. We applied [Guide 3910 of the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions \(ISSAI 300\)](#).

Furthermore, a survey was created for MPs with questions that helped us determine the value for money/return on investment on Parlantino. The survey consisted of two parts. Part 1 contained questions geared towards understanding the effectiveness of Parliament’s membership in Parlantino, and part 2 contained questions towards assessing the efficiency, effectiveness, and compliance of general travel-related activities to ensure the responsible and transparent use of public funds. The survey contained a total of 28 questions.²⁹

Parliament accepted the proposal to engage the General Audit Chamber to assess the return on investment of Parlantino, 7 Members of Parliament responded to the survey, which is a response rate of 47%. We do not consider the data from the survey a representative sample, and the results are not based on a statistical analysis. Despite this limitation, we note the results from the survey.

²⁶ Overview for travel and accommodation cost received from finance department d.d. January 19, 2023

²⁷ Information received by the Secretary General of Parliament d.d. October 4, 2023

²⁸ Information received by SG Parliament d.d. October 4, 2023, no information for years 2010, 2011 and 2013.

²⁹ In case of unclarity pertaining to the survey, we indicated that this could be mentioned in the open-question part of the survey and that we could be contacted if there were any questions. We have not received any questions.

5.4.1 Economy: Minimizing costs

1. WERE THE MOST ECONOMICAL TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS USED?

We highlight the cost of travel for Parlatino in 2022. As our investigation revealed, business-class flights were the preferred choice in the absence of First-class availability. In instances where business class was not an option, economy class travel was utilized.

Although the legislation and travel guidelines allow for Business / First class travel, we believe specific basic requirements should be in place, such as minimum traveling hours to travel in Business class flights. From the survey results, 6 out of the 7 MPs agree with setting criteria for flying specific flight classes to reduce spending of public funds and optimize costs.

2. HAVE PER DIEM COSTS BEEN KEPT TO A MINIMUM?

Per diem costs were kept within prescribed guidelines at ANG 720 per day. Parliamentarians are not required to submit an expense report with supporting documentation. Despite this not being a legal requirement, an expense report should be required to ensure the transparent use of public funds. From the survey results, 6 out of the 7 MPs agree with this suggestion.

3. IS UNSPENT PER DIEM REIMBURSED?

Although reimbursing per diem is not required based on the guidelines, we believe that to ensure efficient and transparent use of public funds, unspent per diem should be reimbursed. Members of Parliament reported that in cases where there was unspent per diem, these were not reimbursed. However, 3 out of 7 respondents do not believe this should be done.

5.4.2 Efficiency: Achieving maximum results with minimum cost

1. ARE THE COSTS JUSTIFIABLE TO TAXPAYERS?

The expenses accrued for Parlatino, exceeding ANG 2 million since St. Maarten's affiliation, are difficult to rationalize.³⁰ Parliament's involvement has yielded limited tangible outcomes.

Parlatino primarily aims to promote legislative harmonization among its Latin member countries, which may not align with St. Maarten's unique legal system and differs significantly from Latin American nations. One notable initiative was the implementation of a permanent Committee for Parlatino Matters, which is responsible for making proposals to the Central Committee on further handling of template draft law and proposals coming from Parlatino.

Among the 7 MPs, 4 stated that there were no concrete results from Parlatino, while one acknowledged some outcomes. Another MP reported significant achievements, including drafting five laws inspired by Parlatino. We recommend an examination of these drafts to assess their potential value.

2. ARE ALL THE COSTS INCURRED NECESSARY?

While the survey indicated that 3 out of 7 MPs do not support the reimbursement of unspent per diem, we recommend establishing per diem rates (lodging and incidental rates) in accordance with international standards. This advice is supported by 6 out of 7 respondents. Additionally, we advocate for transparency and accountability in using public funds for travel expenses.

Therefore, we recommend submitting travel expense reports and receipts to ensure a clear record of expenditures. Until such a process is incorporated into the policy, we are unable to determine if all the costs incurred were necessary.

³⁰ Parliament hosted Parlatino meetings on Sr. Maarten in the past. According to the SG of Parliament, this has an economic spinoff for the country. Reaction d.d. December 27th, from the Secretary-General of Parliament on the draft report

5.4.3 Effectiveness: to what extent are the objectives achieved

1. ARE WE CONVINCED THAT THE PROJECT WILL HELP ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES?

Based on Parliament's motion to assess the return on investment of Parlatino and explore redirecting resources to other regional organizations, it is evident that there is a consensus that the objectives are not being achieved through Parlatino. From the survey, 6 out of 7 respondents believes that alternatives to Parlatino should be explored, and 3 MPs suggested exploring regional alternatives to Parlatino.

2. WHAT REAL WORLD CHANGE IS MEMBERSHIP IN PARLATINO DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE? DOES THE POTENTIAL GAIN JUSTIFY THE PRICE TAG?

Parlatino predominantly consists of Latin American member countries. Given the language barrier (Spanish) and parliamentary model differences, the effectiveness of Parlatino is questionable. It is unclear whether these differences make incorporating draft model laws produced by Parlatino difficult.³¹

Furthermore, over 13 years Parlatino membership and spending over ANG 2 million in participating in Parlatino, one report was submitted to the General Audit Chamber on the effectiveness of Parlatino ("*Proposal on the way forward for participation in Parlatino*"). We were not privy to any additional information that could help us ascertain changes in parliamentary procedures resulting from participation and engagement in Parlatino.

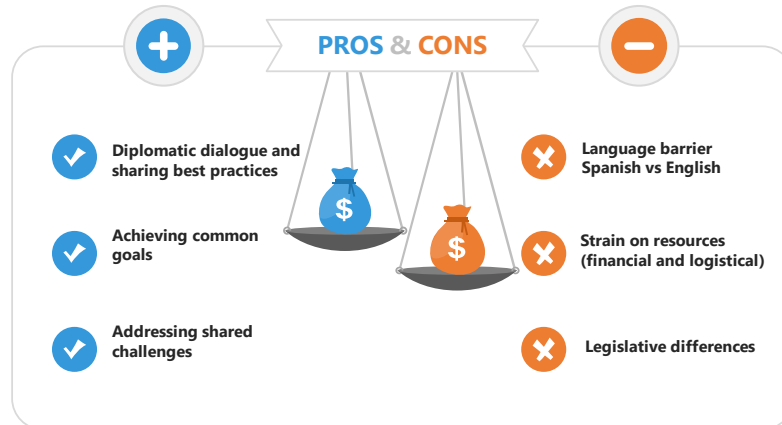
³¹ <https://parlatino.org/> lists that Parlatino prepared preliminary drafts, projects, and proposals for Model Laws, 9 out of 112 have been translated into English.

6. PARLATINO: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

6.1 Benefits and challenges being a member of Parlatino

Being a member in Parlatino comes with both benefits and challenges. Figure 3 depicts some of them.

Figure 3: Benefits and challenges of Parlatino membership



Parlatino provides a platform for member nations. It promotes collaboration and knowledge sharing and encourages the exchange of best practices. Member countries try to collaborate within Parlatino, working towards shared goals. This collaborative approach creates a form of unity among Latin American and Caribbean nations. Furthermore, Parlatino membership offers a structured framework for addressing common challenges. This enables coordinated efforts to tackle, for example, economic, environmental, and social issues.

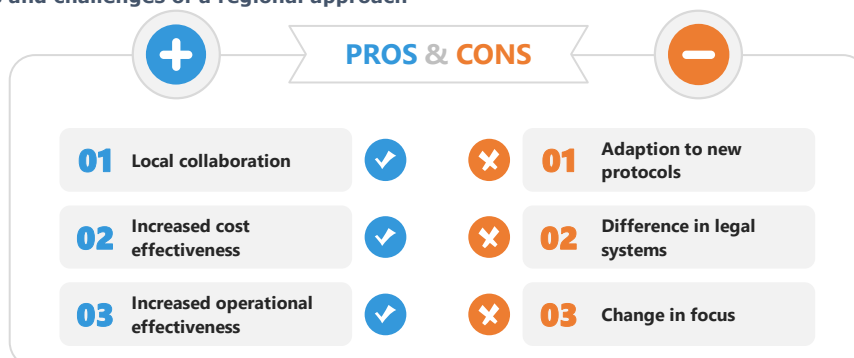
However, Parlatino operates primarily in Spanish as its official working language, as stipulated in its bylaws. Furthermore, being a member of Parlatino is a strain on financial and logistical resources, which are required for active in-person participation. This may divert resources from addressing other priorities and challenges. One of Parlatino's primary objectives is to promote legislative harmonization among its member countries, predominantly Latin countries. The effectiveness of this goal is debatable, especially considering that St. Maarten has a legal system that significantly differs from those of other Latin American nations.

Next, we will analyze the benefits and challenges of a regional approach.

6.2 Benefits and challenges: a regional approach

Pursuing membership in a regional organization offers pros and cons, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Benefits and challenges of a regional approach



Unlike the broader focus of Parlatino across Latin America, a St. Maarten-centric regional approach customizes agreements specifically for our needs in the Caribbean. This allows working closely with neighboring nations in the region, focusing on collaboration that benefits St. Maarten and the wider Caribbean community. A regional approach is more cost-efficient as it enables neighboring nations to collaborate on initiatives. By sharing resources and coordinating strategies, economies of scale can be achieved, leading to more effective and streamlined solutions. This collaborative model often results in a more efficient allocation of resources, potentially reducing the financial burden on each participating nation.

Collaborating regionally is more strategic, particularly given the language diversity within Parlatino where Spanish predominates, while English is more common in the Caribbean/St. Maarten region. This cooperative model enhances operational efficiency, seeing the change in more effective communication and shared understanding. This approach, grounded in effective communication and streamlined resource utilization, contributes to operational efficiency and overall effectiveness in achieving (common) objectives.

However, transitioning from Parlatino to a regional organization may necessitate St. Maarten's Parliament to adapt to new protocols and procedures, potentially requiring additional resources and time for reorientation, considering its longstanding membership in Parlatino. Similar to the challenges faced by being a member of Parlatino, joining a regional organization could pose legal harmonization challenges for St. Maarten. The diversity in legal systems among member states could complicate the alignment of legislation, potentially complicating effective collaboration. Furthermore, moving from Parlatino to a regional organization may require Parliament to rethink its main priorities. This shift could make staying focused on national goals challenging while adapting to the broader regional agenda.

Finally, Parliament currently holds positions in several Parlatino committees. Transitioning to a new regional organization might result in uncertainty about the specific roles and positions St. Maarten would secure.

We note that the perceived benefits and challenges depend on Parliament's specific circumstances and priorities.

6.3 Alternatives to Parlatino

In the Caribbean region, several parliamentary bodies facilitate regional cooperation and dialogue. Such as:

1. [THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY \(CARICOM\) PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY](#)
CARICOM BRINGS TOGETHER REPRESENTATIVES FROM MEMBER STATES TO DISCUSS AND COORDINATE REGIONAL INITIATIVES.
2. [THE ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES \(ACS\)](#)
THE ASSOCIATION INCLUDES A PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION THAT FOCUSES ON ADDRESSING SHARED CHALLENGES AND PROMOTING COOPERATION AMONG ITS MEMBER COUNTRIES.
3. [ORGANIZATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES \(OECS\)](#)
THE OECS PARLIAMENT FACILITATES COOPERATION AMONG EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES, PROVIDING A FORUM FOR PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATIVES TO DISCUSS REGIONAL ISSUES AND COORDINATE EFFORTS FOR ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

While not identical to Parlatino, these organizations serve as platforms for parliamentary collaboration in the Caribbean region. We note that the above list is not exhaustive and merely serves as examples. It is up to Parliament to either continue with Parlatino or consider other alternatives.

6.4 Final observations

The decision-making process behind St. Maarten becoming a member of Parlatino lacks transparency, as the goals and objectives of this initial commitment remain unclear. The absence of objectives and no clear tangible outcomes from the membership raise questions about the impact and effectiveness of St. Maarten's participation in Parlatino over the past 13 years.

Finally, The Parlatino website lacks updated information specific to St. Maarten regarding the current Governor and Prime Minister.

7. EPILOGUE

As part of our process, we extend an invitation to minister(s) and Parliament to provide their responses before we proceed to publish our findings. We appreciate the valuable input and feedback received from civil servants, Minister(s) and Parliament.

The General Audit Chamber acknowledges the significance of business travel for the efficient functioning of the government. It is important to clarify that this audit does not focus on individual trips but rather aims to highlight opportunities for enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of government and parliamentary travel and spending. The travel policies and laws need to be reconsidered as far as we are concerned. This is further supported by the [Integrity Chamber](#) which advised the Government on travel and accommodation expenses being paid by third parties.

The audit also assessed the effectiveness of Parlatino, a matter requested by Parliament. We distributed a survey to gather additional feedback from MPs; we received 7 responses (47%).

We aim to facilitate Parliament with information which they can use to make the most effective and efficient decision in moving forward.

ANNEX 1: VALUE FOR MONEY? MINISTER OF JUSTICE: GENEVA, LYON, PARIS, AND THE HAGUE

Economy: Minimizing costs	
1. WAS THE MOST ECONOMICAL TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS USED?	<p>No. The Minister chose first-class travel, costing ANG 9,904, her delegation travelled economy class for ANG 2,763 each, a difference of ANG 7,141. The hotel rate was negotiated, and no evidence suggests an expensive alternative was chosen.</p> <p>We note that from the audit and from the documents submitted it does not show if online meetings were considered.</p>
2. HAVE PER DIEM COSTS BEEN KEPT TO A MINIMUM?	<p>Unable to determine. The per diem totaled around ANG 20,000 for 3 persons. Ministers are not required to track their expenses, which means they do not have to explain how they spend the per diem. This makes it difficult to ensure responsible use of public funds.</p>
3. WERE EFFORTS MADE TO NEGOTIATE FAVORABLE RATES FOR THE TRAVEL?	<p>Efforts were made to negotiate rates for the hotels in Geneva. The reaction of the Ministry of Justice on the Memorandum of Findings dated July 31st, 2023, mentions that the hotel rate was reasonable and fell within the scope of acceptable rates so there was no urgent need to negotiate the rate.</p> <p>We note that the approved per diem for travel is €400 while €500 was approved for Geneva and Paris. The delegation stayed within allotted per diem for their travel to The Hague.</p>
Efficiency: Achieving maximum results with minimum costs	
4. ARE THE COSTS JUSTIFIABLE TO TAXPAYERS?	<p>The reason for the Minister's first-class travel is explained as follows by the Ministry of Justice: It regarded a long night flight, crossing different time-zones from St. Maarten to Geneva with directly after arrival important preparatory meetings with Kingdom delegations. Quickly travelling across several time zones during a long flight is what causes jet lag. The Minister had an important responsibility as Head of Delegation of the Kingdom. Travelling in First class, especially for a long night flight, can give more comfort which will improve the performance of a high-ranked Government official.</p>

<p>5. ARE ALL THE ACTIVITIES OR COSTS NECESSARY? (HAVE WE EXCLUDED ALL THE "NICE TO HAVE" ELEMENTS?)</p>	<p>St. Maarten's in person representation during the UPR as Head of the Delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was necessary.</p> <p>The courtesy visit to the Headquarters of Interpol was the kick-off of strengthening St. Maarten's local Interpol bureau and to improve active participation of law enforcement agencies in a worldwide network. As a direct tangible result of the courtesy visit in November 2022, a delegation of the Headquarters of Interpol visited St. Maarten in May 2023.</p> <p>Since the Quality Standard Visit of Interpol, substantial steps have been taken in the participation of St. Maarten in Interpol initiatives, regional actions, Interpol tools and training programs for law enforcement officers.</p> <p>On November 17th, 2022, the Minister of Justice and her delegation met with brand executives of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy in Paris to strengthen anti-counterfeiting initiatives. DISOSA, the brand protection agency for Latin-America, representing Luis Vuitton, Nike, PUMA and other renown brands, states that since the launch of the anti-counterfeit campaign of the Ministry of Justice in 2022, at least six luxury brands owners are considering to open stores in St. Maarten in 2024.³²</p> <p>The Minister of Justice and the Senior Legal Policy Advisor of Judicial Affairs, met with Minister of Legal Protection of the Netherlands, on Friday November 18, 2022. During the meeting the Minister discussed the urgent lack of cell capacity in St. Maarten. The meeting resulted in the transfer of twelve (12) long sentenced inmates to the Netherlands. The transfer of twelve inmates has prevented any new premature releases of suspects of serious crimes. In addition, since the meeting with the Minister of Legal Protection in November and the Ministry of Justice and Security have actively been participating in the UNOPS project for matters related to technical expertise in the field of detention.</p> <p>Based on the results we conclude that the activities were necessary and all the "nice to have" elements were excluded.</p>
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<p>Effectiveness: to what extent are the objectives achieved?</p>	
<p>6. WHAT REAL WORLD CHANGE IS THE TRIP DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE? DOES THE POTENTIAL GAIN JUSTIFY THE PRICE TAG</p>	<p>Geneva: Present progress, challenges, and collaborate with member states to enhance human rights.</p> <p>Interpol (Lyon) The potential gains, such as improved law enforcement, international cooperation, and access to expertise, can justify the associated costs in maintaining national security.</p> <p>LVMH (Paris): The travel aimed to deepen connections with luxury brand representatives and foster cooperation against counterfeiting.</p>
<p>7. ARE WE CONVINCED THAT THE PROJECT WILL HELP ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES?</p>	<p>Currently unknown. Depends on outcomes, recommendations' impact, reputation, partnerships, and long-term human rights improvements.</p>

³² The Daily Herald, August 7th, 2023.

ANNEX 2: VALUE FOR MONEY? TOURISM BUREAU: MONACO YACHT SHOW 2022

Economy: Minimizing costs	
1. WAS THE MOST ECONOMICAL TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS USED?	Yes. The delegation flew economy as per the travel policy. The delegation chose accommodation on the outside of the city to save costs. We were not privy to a financial breakdown of the costs.
2. HAVE PER DIEM COSTS BEEN KEPT TO A MINIMUM?	Unable to determine. No declaration form including supporting documents were received. Paragraph 4.3 reveals lack of proper account for per diem expenses, raising concerns about accountability and audit risk in minimizing personal benefit.
3. WERE EFFORTS MADE TO NEGOTIATE FAVORABLE RATES FOR THE TRAVEL?	By staying outside of Monaco, efforts were made to reduce costs.
Efficiency: Achieving maximum results with minimum costs	
4. ARE THE COSTS JUSTIFIABLE TO TAXPAYERS?	No information is available regarding measurable economic benefits or assessment of outcomes. The intention is to draft a strategic plan to measure economic benefits, however, to date, such a plan has not been drafted.
5. ARE ALL THE ACTIVITIES OR COSTS NECESSARY? (HAVE WE EXCLUDED ALL THE "NICE TO HAVE" ELEMENTS?)	<p>In this case, the objective of the trip was to maintain a leadership position in the regional yachting industry. However, the absence of an economic plan or statistics hinders the development of a clear strategy to attain this goal. This raises the question of whether the budget could have been better utilized if a plan, supported by sector-specific statistics was created before the travel.</p> <p>Besides an impact study, there are plans to gather data and build relationships with brokers to determine the demand for St. Maarten as a destination. The advice for the execution of an impact study was approved in 2023 and a public tender will</p>
Effectiveness: to what extent are the objectives achieved	
6. WHAT REAL WORLD CHANGE IS THE TRIP DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE? DOES THE POTENTIAL GAIN JUSTIFY THE PRICE TAG	The travel aimed to be a fact-finding mission with the objective of understanding the potential economic spin-off in the industry and to create destination awareness. Therefore, there are no "real-world changes" measurable. Additionally, no alternative options were considered, raising concerns about the efficient utilization of the ANG 30,000 budget.
7. ARE WE CONVINCED THAT THE PROJECT WILL HELP ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES?	Currently unknown. Without quantifiable information, it is unclear whether the objectives of the travel were accomplished. There is a lack of data regarding the direct impact of the Monaco Yacht Show exposure, such as the number of yachts from the show that visited SXM, making it difficult to assess the project's effectiveness in meeting business plan objectives.
8. WILL THE BENEFITS BE SUSTAINED IN THE LONG TERM?	Based on the available information and the inability to determine the effectiveness of the project's approach, we are unable to provide a definitive answer as to whether the project benefits will be sustained in the long term. Additional data and analysis are required to make a more informed judgment in this regard.



General Audit Chamber

Algemene Rekenkamer