One year after the military seized power once again, Germans still tend to think of Thailand as a tropical dream destination. In reality, it has become a dictatorship. The draft constitution that was written will not bridge the political divide that runs through the country.

Dr. Peter Walkenhorst

In the current issue of the Asia Policy Brief Serhat Ünaldi, project manager in the program "Germany and Asia" at Bertelsmann Stiftung, analyses the political developments in Thailand since the coup on May 22, 2014. He argues that Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha is unable to comprehend the problems his country is facing and to develop appropriate solutions. The inclusion of a Germany-inspired mixed-member proportional representation system for the election of parliamentarians into the draft constitution that is currently under deliberation may even exacerbate the ability to govern Thailand effectively.

The military-appointed Constitution Drafting Committee was chiefly interested in weakening the position of future prime ministers. The aim is to
generate broad coalition governments while countless appointed councils guarantee that conservative royalists preserve their influence on Thai politics. That way, the charter drafters hope to reduce the power of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra who had been ousted in a previous coup in 2006. Even from his self-imposed exile, he had managed to steer his party from one electoral success to another owing to his enormous popularity among the poor and the emerging lower middle classes. Branded as a populist by his critics, Thaksin had become a threat to the interests of King Bhumibol’s followers who feared a radical social change and a corresponding fall from power.

The putsch of May 22, 2014 was an attempt by the military to bring to an end what had been set in motion in 2006, namely to force Thaksin to his knees through a constitution that creates a hostile atmosphere for elected politicians. Meanwhile, the Thai economy remains anaemic while General Prayuth is courting China and Russia, suppressing political opponents, threatening the media and dragging democracy activists as well as critics of the monarchy before martial courts. The future of Thailand remains bleak.

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