



**SEATIDE policy seminar:
“The Crisis in Thailand
in Long-Term Perspective”**

- Report -

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Brussels

SEATIDE's third EEAS Southeast Asia Briefing on the Crisis in Thailand

The European External Action Service (EEAS) in Brussels hosted SEATIDE final dissemination event on 18 February 2016. This was the latest of the project's EEAS Southeast Asia Briefings, a series of briefing sessions developed to foster dialogue between academics and policymakers, one of the project's key initial aims. The two previous meetings addressed transversal issues concerning Southeast Asian as a whole: the rising middle classes (11 May 2015) and patterns of authoritarianism (12 May 2015). This time, a country focus was adopted and the briefing was entitled 'The Crisis in Thailand in Long-term Perspective'.

After introductions by Ranieri Sabatucci (EEAS Southeast Asia Division), Philippe Keraudren (DG Research) and Andrew Hardy, Tim Harper chaired the presentation of three papers.

The first, by Michael Montesano (historian, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore), was entitled 'The NCPO Junta's Project: How might it crumble, and who will be left to pick up the pieces?' This built on analysis published in a SEATIDE online paper on 'the people' in the Thai army's thinking about democracy, but expressed pessimism that present-day constitution drafting will lead to the creation of effective, inclusive and durable institutions. Continued political instability is prominent among imaginable scenarios for the country's future.

The second, by Andrew Gibbs (investment manager, Henderson Rowe, London), was entitled 'The Seven Ages of Man: Policy Options for A Rapidly Ageing Asian Society'. Demographic change involving rising life expectancy, falling fertility and an ageing population leaves Thailand facing a future of low productivity growth and low economic growth. Possible solutions include raising the retirement age and investing in education. They also require an end to the political crisis, as some hard choices need to be made.

The third, by Chayan Vaddhanaphuti (anthropologist, Chiang Mai University), was entitled 'The Refugees along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar Border: Alternative Policies for Repatriation'. For 30 years, Thailand has recognised 'displaced persons' here, not refugees, meaning if they leave the camps, they may be deported as 'illegal immigrants'. Solutions include allocating land in Burma for their repatriation and integrating them into Thailand. As these difficult policy options are considered, the border area needs rethinking: borders are increasingly 'deregulated' and what used to be a sovereign territory's margin now forms a zone of opportunity and connectivity within ASEAN.

The presentation was followed by questions and a wide-ranging discussion.