

Politics professor involved in Cyprus power-sharing negotiations

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John McGarry and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at a recent high-level meeting in Geneva.

John McGarry recently participated in a high-level gathering in Geneva between the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities of Cyprus regarding the reunification of the divided country. The negotiations were chaired by UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon.

"The two sides were able to clarify their position on a lot of different fronts," says Dr. McGarry, a political studies professor and part-time advisor to the UN on the Cyprus talks. "They have now returned to Cyprus where the UN is optimistic they will intensify their negotiations."

Dr. McGarry's involvement in the Cyprus negotiations started in September 2008, half-way through his 15-month tenure as 'Senior Advisor on Power-sharing' to the UN (Mediation Support Unit).

Despite the overwhelming Greek-Cypriot rejection of reunification in a 2004 referendum, a change in leadership in the south resulted in a renewed attempt at an agreement in 2008.

"The north and south have much to gain by reunifying, but reaching an agreement will require compromise and hard work" says Dr. McGarry. "The south is very prosperous and it's not clear that everyone wants to jeopardize this by bringing in a poorer part. The first preference of some in the north would be for independence over reunification. It's a trade-off between the gains and the minuses from a settlement."

Dr. McGarry's interest in issues of minority rights, ethnic conflict and peace-making grew out of his upbringing as a minority Irish Catholic in Belfast during the height of political unrest and violence in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s and 70s.

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"I've studied this area for a long time, so I love the opportunity to bring my research to bear on these real issues and to have my own research informed in turn by hands-on policy-making," he says. "I can also talk about aspects that aren't confidential in the classroom and share with my students the experience of being involved in this kind of politics."

Dr. McGarry will eventually write a book about Cyprus. He hopes it will tell the story of the country's successful reunification.

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