A support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland

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All of the Members who spoke in the debate on the EU's programme in favour of peace in Northern Ireland stressed the importance of this initiative. Roberto Speciale, the Chairman of the Committee on Regional Affairs, felt that it demonstrated that the Union was not 'distant and abstract' but 'close to the realities and problems' of the Community. The rapporteur, John HUME (PSE), who had been working towards reconciliation in Northern Ireland for many years, thanked Jacques Delors for having reacted to the peace there so quickly and Mr Santer for having made every effort to push this initiative through. He echoed the words of the other two Members from Northern Ireland (Unionists) with whom he had worked, namely Reverend Paisley and James Nicholson (a joint press conference had been held in Strasbourg by the three Members to highlight this event). According to Mr HUME, the three Members had worked together in total harmony, and he also emphasised the extent to which the Commission had been working 'on the ground' on this matter. Mrs Wulf-Mathies, the Commissioner responsible for regional policy, who was speaking on behalf of the Commission, pointed out that the unique nature of this initiative was consistent with the exceptional situation that had given rise to it. Reconciliation was not possible without the cooperation of all parties on the ground. She noted that throughout the process the parties had shown themselves to be very willing to come to an understanding and in this respect the Commission would be able to take a decision on the initiative in May 1995. She welcomed the EP's proposal to reduce by two months the deadlines for the presentation of specific programmes and stressed the importance of guaranteeing maximum transparency and flexibility when implementing the programme along with effective budgetary control. She added that the Commission was very keen to earmark 15% of the funding for cross-border cooperation on the projects in the interests of the effectiveness of the programme.