A support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland

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This Commission communication to the Council and the European Parliament relates to a support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. The Commission deals in its communication with the new potential created by the cessation of violence in this country and the measures which could be used to respond to this new political situation. According to the Commission's analysis, the best way of taking advantage of this chance for reconciliation would be to launch a special support programme which would have an immediate and lasting impact on the ground and would complement intervention by the Structural Funds. It would be based on the following: - a commitment by the two governments to adapt the programmes implemented under the Structural Funds to the new challenges created by the cessation of violence; - a commitment by the two governments to take maximum advantage of the new political situation when implementing Community initiatives; - a new separate Commission initiative for the benefit of Northern Ireland and the border counties based on support for disadvantaged and marginalised zones in the form of urban and rural regeneration programmes, employment development measures, the development of cross-border activities and social insertion; - extending the benefit of interest rate subsidies on loans granted by the EIB to local SMEs beyond the date currently planned (1 July 1995); - re-evaluating local infrastructures in the context of the trans-European networks (e.g. Newry-border motorway); - ensuring that existing and new political instruments are consistent (e.g. joint funding of programmes with agencies such as the International Fund for Ireland). The Commission feels that the new initiative complementing the Structural Funds should last 5 years, thereby coinciding with the length of Structural Fund programmes and has proposed a budget of ECU 300 million for the first three years (the budget for the last two years will be reviewed on the basis of a Commission report). The main fields of intervention under this initiative will be as follows: - employment, by developing the economy and professional qualifications; - urban and rural regeneration, by promoting extensive local development and a process of economic and social recovery in urban zones, towns and villages (renovation, redevelopment, new small rural infrastructures, parks etc.); - the development of cross-border activities, by strengthening commercial, economic and agricultural cooperation and providing aid for new "joint ventures"; - social insertion, by encouraging cooperation between basic local authorities in the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland and in the border counties.