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**SANTER WELCOMES FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT ON NORTHERN IRELAND**

European Commission President Jacques Santer welcomed the publication today of the British and Irish governments' Framework Document on Northern Ireland as "a further important step towards peace and reconciliation" in the province.

President Santer said he supported the intention to launch a consultative process through the document in order to "strengthen the democratic foundations for agreement among the people of the island of Ireland on the basis of full respect for the rights of both traditions".

In the Document, which Prime Ministers John Major of Britain and John Bruton of Ireland released at a ceremony outside Belfast, both governments recognize the importance of the European Union dimension. The European Union has consistently supported moves towards peace and reconciliation in the province, most recently through the allocation of 300 million ECU (approximately \$400 million) to fund the first three years of a special five year program for Northern Ireland (see EU NEWS, 6/95).

From Brussels, President Santer congratulated both governments on what has been achieved so far and said he looked forward to further progress on which lasting agreement could be built. "The Commission stands ready to help in the process in any way it can," he said.

The province has enjoyed almost six months of peace since the ceasefire began in September 1994.

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