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URBAN RENEWAL IN NORTHERN IRELAND : The Commission proposes a
Community measure in Belfast

The Commission has just approved a proposal for a regulation instituting a specific measure to promote urban renewal in Northern Ireland (Belfast).

This proposal foresees the financing, together with the national and local authorities, of an exceptional measure going beyond the possibilities of the Community's existing financial instruments with the purpose of providing assistance for the urban renewal of Belfast and thus making a more significant contribution to the progressive solution of the social and economic problems of Northern Ireland.

The Community's financial participation should be approximately 100 million ECU over the period 1982 to 1985 inclusive.

In November 1981 the Commission submitted a proposal to the Council for a specific measure to promote housing in Northern Ireland within the framework of an integrated operation in Belfast. This proposal was the first follow-up to the European Parliament's resolution of 19th June 1981 (1) on Community regional policy and Northern Ireland. Unfortunately the Council was

(1) O.J. n° C 172 of 13.7.1981, p. 122

unable to take a decision on this first proposal in view of preoccupations expressed by certain Member States concerning the financing of housing by the Community .

The present proposal constitutes an alternative solution having the same aim : reinforcing Community aid for a region suffering from considerable social and economic problems.

The European Parliament has on several occasions stressed the worsening situation in this region, making particular reference to poverty and low incomes, housing conditions and the health of the population - especially in Belfast - as well as the very high levels of unemployment and under-employment.

For this reason Northern Ireland benefits in the context of all Community policies and financial instruments from priority treatment, from higher rates of Community aids and from several specific actions intended, together with measures undertaken by the United Kingdom, to deal with the region's structural problems. From 1973 to 1982 inclusive, Northern Ireland has benefitted from Community grants for structural purposes of over £ 360 million reaching in 1982 roughly 1 % of regional GDP (compared to a EEC average of 0.2 %).

It is within this general framework that the Commission's initiative is to be seen.