
ITALIAN EURO PARLIAMENT CHIEF DENIES CLAIMING CROATIAN TERRITORY

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Antonio Tajani expressed regret on Monday for a statement he made at a WWII ceremony in Trieste the previous day about Italian Istria and Italian Dalmatia, after his apparent territorial claims on Croatian and Slovenian land sparked anger in both countries.

But at the beginning of a plenary session of the European Parliament on Monday afternoon, Tajani said his words had been misinterpreted.

With my presence [at the ceremony], I wanted to remember thousands of victims, Italians, but also Croats and Slovenians, he said.

In my speech I wanted to highlight the path of peace and reconciliation between the Italian, I spoke about Italian Istria and Dalmatia, but this does not mean the appropriation of the territory □ we talked about the Italians, their grandchildren and the sons who were present at this ceremony, he added.

He insisted that his intention was not to offend anyone and that he wanted to send a message of peace between peoples, so that what happened never happens again.

Italian media reported on Sunday that in the Trieste speech, Tajani said: Long live Trieste, long live Italian Istria, long live Italian Dalmatia.

This cause anger in Croatia, whose region of Istria and parts of Dalmatia were liberated from Italian occupation during WWII.

Croatian state officials strongly condemned Tajanis speech. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, the leader of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ, said that he spoke to Tajani about the issue.

I told him we were extremely displeased with such a statement, which is inappropriate, and we requested an explanation, Plenkovic said.

Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic also condemned Tajanis statement: Such statements are not conducive to reconciliation, coexistence and all the civilised values on which the European Union was built, she said.

The Croatian Peasant Party, HSS, an associate member of the European Peoples Party, EPP, to which Tajani also belongs, threatened to quit the group in protest.

In a post on Twitter, HSS leader Kreso Beljak called Tajanis statement scandalous and said his

party will make a decision about leaving the EPP at its central bodys next meeting.

Slovenian officials also complained strongly about Tajanis statement, with Prime Minister Marjan Sarec calling it historical revisionism without precedent, Politico reported.

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