

AIR FRANCE HIRES FRENCH PM'S AIDE AS HR HEAD IN TURBULENT TIMES

News / Airlines



Air France said on Wednesday that French Prime Minister Manuel Valls' industrial relations adviser was taking over as head of human resources at the airline as conflict over planned cost and job cuts rages between management and pilots.

Current HR head Xavier Broseta, who had his shirt ripped off as angry employees hounded him out of a meeting about job losses last week, will take up a new post at Franco-Dutch parent group Air France-KLM.

Gilles Gateau, deputy chief of staff and labour relations aide to Valls, will replace Broseta, Air France said in a statement.

Gateau, 56, was an aide to ex-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin from 1997 to 2001, whose Socialist government opened up the then state-owned carrier's share-ownership to private investors.

He then spent 11 years in the human resources division of state-controlled power group EDF.

From 2012 to 2014, Gateau was chief of staff to then labour minister Michel Sapin, now Valls' finance minister.

Gateau, who will join Air France on Nov. 1 before taking up his new role in January, arrives in the middle of a labour dispute which made headlines after pictures of Broseta fleeing through crowds of angry workers were broadcast around the world.

Broseta was shown his shirt ripped off, his tie loose around his neck, scaling a fence to escape angry workers. A second manager had his shirt ripped down the back, and a security guard was left unconscious for several hours after the melee.

Air France had previously failed to secure pilots' agreement on a plan to increase working hours for the same pay, prompting it to propose a more draconian "Plan B" involving plans for 2,900 job cuts.

Like other European carriers, Air France is wrestling with growing competition on short-haul routes from low-cost airlines and on long-haul routes from Gulf-based airlines backed by their countries' sovereign wealth.

Valls called the violence at Air France a national embarrassment. Several Air France workers were arrested on Monday and face trial in December accused of offences that expose them to up to three years in jail.

The Socialist government has sought to put across a more business friendly image and show France has the stomach for free-market reforms.

Energy Minister Segolene Royal on Wednesday accused Air France managers of having been "a bit weak" in terms of dialogue with workers.

Asked if the restructuring should include 2,900 job cuts, the minister, who oversees transport, told BFM TV: "I don't think so ... You don't run a company by pressuring or undermining employees."

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