

COURT ALLOWS LUFTHANSA PILOT STRIKE

News / Airlines



Lufthansa failed in a legal bid to halt a pilot strike planned for Wednesday which resulted in about 1,000 flights being cancelled.

Pilots' union Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) staged a strike on long-haul routes on Tuesday and has called another walkout for Wednesday on short-haul flights - and warned there could be more pain to come.

"We cannot rule out further strikes this week," union spokesman Markus Wahl said. "Strikes are possible in the following weeks as well."

The pilots' 13th strike in 18 months forced Lufthansa to cancel 84 of about 170 long-haul flights on Tuesday and about 1,000 flights - or two-thirds of its schedule - on Wednesday, including another 52 long-haul flights.

It drew a defiant response from the airline, which said it would not take on any new pilots under current German collective agreements, meaning its core Lufthansa, Germanwings and cargo divisions will shrink as staff leave.

Lufthansa's bid to stop the strike via a temporary injunction was rejected by a Frankfurt court on Tuesday.

The airline, which is trying to cut costs to better compete with budget rivals, is also suing the union

over a strike at Lufthansa Cargo in April 2014, questioning the legality of the walkout because there was a valid pay deal at the time.

"We are determined... The pilots are going about this the wrong way," a Lufthansa spokeswoman said.

Relations between management and the VC union soured last week after the breakdown of talks aimed at resolving a dispute that started over retirement benefits but has since escalated to encompass Lufthansa's plans to expand low-cost Eurowings operations.

Lufthansa said in future it would only discuss pay and contract issues with VC, effectively shutting the union out of strategy issues.

The strikes have cost Lufthansa about EUR€100 million (USD\$112 million) so far this year.

Pilots have offered concessions, including an increase in the average retirement age to 60 and a commitment to look at ways to reduce costs to a level comparable with easyJet. But they have also demanded the company stops moving jobs out of Germany as it seeks to expand low-cost operations.

The UFO union, which represents cabin crew, also waded into the debate last week, saying the row had already cost jobs and that strikes would not bring a resolution.

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