

Dutch staff warn Air France-KLM of strikes over chief

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Air France and KLM merged in 2004 but continue to operate largely separately

Dutch airline managers have warned Air France-KLM of possible strikes if KLM chief executive Pieter Elbers is not reappointed, reports said on Monday.

The Dutch government also gave its support to Elbers getting a fresh term amid suggestions he could be removed at a board meeting of the French-Dutch group on February 19.

In a letter, senior KLM managers said there could be industrial action if Elbers was forced to leave, the Dutch news agency ANP reported.

The letter from the KLM managers also criticised the management style of Air France-KLM's new Canadian CEO Ben Smith, who took the helm at the troubled airline in September.

Dutchman Elbers was named head of Air France-KLM's Dutch wing in 2018 after the rapid exit of the group's CEO Jean-Marc Janailac in a bitter dispute over salaries in the French arm.

The company kept Elbers in the role after naming Smith as its first non-French chief executive, but ANP reported that he was seen as "difficult" and standing in the way of Smith's plans to merge the two arms more closely.

The Dutch government stepped into the fray last week when it officially backed Elbers' reappointment.

Dutch Finance Minister Wopke Hoekstra raised the subject with his French counterpart Bruno Le Maire at a meeting of eurozone ministers in Brussels on Monday.



The Dutch government stepped last week came out in support of Pieter Elbers' reappointment

Hoekstra said he had been clear in a letter to KLM last week "in which I said that I thought Elbers had done good work and that I support his reappointment".

Hoekstra said he would not give details of his talks with the Frenchman but said that "Mr Le Maire and I have a lot of contact on Air France-KLM, on which we can guarantee the interests of the two countries will be respected."

Air France and KLM merged in 2004 but still continue to operate largely separately, while the French arm has in particular struggled with

industrial action in recent years.

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