Source: Daily Mail {Main}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Friday 22, May 2020
Page: 75
Area: 267 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 1132908 Daily
Ad data: page rate £32,508.00, scc rate £129.00
Phone: 020 7938 6000
Keyword: Stelios Haji-ioannou

Easyjet braced for showdown with Stelios

by ***Francesca Washtell***

EASYJET is braced for a dramatic showdown today with its founder Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou as he attempts to oust four directors.

Stelios will grill bosses about the budget airline's ties to European plane maker Airbus.

And he will lead a vote to unseat board members including chief executive Johan Lundgren and chairman John Barton, whom he has branded 'scoundrels' over their decision not to cancel a £4.5bn order with Airbus that he believes will sink the company.

Stelios (*pictured*) has been at war with the board of Easyjet over the order for more than 100 planes since March.

He insists it will not need that many replacement aircraft in the coming years because of the coronavirus crisis – and also believes it will burn a huge hole in Easyjet's finances.

The outspoken entrepreneur – who with his family owns 34pc of Easyjet's shares – vowed to pick off board members until he gets his way. And last week he shocked the City when he offered a bounty of up to £5m for anyone who could provide information pointing to possible misdeeds or corruption between Easyjet and Airbus which could scupper the deal.

At today's meeting, shareholders will be asked to vote on whether to sack Lundgren, Barton, finance director Andrew Findlay and independent non-executive director Andreas Bierwirth.

Although Stelios and his family only control around a third of the company's stock, it is thought the vote could be close because Easyjet needs a majority of the shareholders who vote to oppose the resolutions tabled by Stelios's Easygroup. If many abstain, this could mean the vote is left hanging in the balance. At the weekend Lundgren said he had spoken to a number of shareholders and that none had said they would be supporting the Greek-born tycoon.

Stelios will also pose questions about whether Airbus controls any shares in Easyjet and whether any of the airline's directors since 2013 have had links to a small group of lawyers, who are thought to have worked with Airbus or linked firms. Hedge funds have placed an almost £200m bet that Easyjet's share price will fall – with 8.5pc of its stock now out on loan to six short-sellers.

Today's showdown comes after Easyjet said yesterday it was planning to restart a number of flights in the UK and France on June 15.

Reproduced by Gorkana under licence from the NLA (newspapers), CLA (magazines), FT (Financial Times/ft.com) or other copyright owner. No further copying (including printing of digital cuttings), digital reproduction/forwarding of the cutting is permitted except under licence from the copyright owner. All FT content is copyright The Financial Times Ltd.

487992732 - VISATT - A12310-1 - 160138815