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'Stupified' union asks French Minister for Ford meeting

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Simon Warburton



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A 'stupefied' Ford union has asked the French Finance Minister for an urgent meeting to discuss the automaker's decision to put its automatic transmissions site in Blanquefort near Bordeaux up for sale.

Should no buyer be found, around 900 jobs are at risk and with an average staff age of 51, the fear is those made redundant will struggle to find further employment.

The Fédération des Travailleurs de la Métallurgie CGT (FTM-CGT) union has written to Finance Minister, Bruno Le Maire,

in whom they may well find a sympathetic ear, with the senior politician saying he “strongly regrets” Ford Aquitaine Industries’ (FAI) move to put the for sale sign up.

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Should the US automaker not secure a buyer for its FAI site at Blanquefort in South West France, the facility will close, although no forced redundancies will be implemented before September next year.

“It is with stupor I learned of Ford’s decision to put a Jobs Safeguard Plan [Plan de Sauvegarde d’Emploi – PSE] in place concerning the Blanquefort plant,” said FTM-CGT Métallurgie secretary general, Frédéric Sanchez.

“I don’t understand this decision and for two reasons: Ford has the means to continue its activities in Blanquefort, notably for the European market. [Also] Ford has asked a firm for a study and investigation with a view to recover activity.

“This PSE decision seems to me to be unacceptable. I see you [Le Maire] don’t share this decision either. It is essential a meeting between the State and our union is organised very rapidly to reflect together in a constructive manner to avoid a social catastrophe and so guarantee the future of the automotive sector in the region.”

Ford has started talking to its Works Council at the plant and has established a taskforce liaising with an external company

specialised in finding new business owners, to identify potential buyers.

FAI has presented a social plan which includes redeployment and early retirement programmes, together with measures to help staff relocate with new employers should no new owner be found and closure follows.

In such a situation, FAI also has committed not to implement any involuntary redundancies before September 2019. In addition, as part of the benefits of the social plan, all of those still working at FAI by September 2019 would see no reduction in their pay until the end of 2019.

The French Finance Minister has taken a hands-on approach to the situation – as he has with several other industrial issues since the election of President Emmanuel Macron last year – and has already visited local politicians in the Bordeaux region to discuss the issue.

“Bruno Le Maire will ensure regional politicians – with whom he has met – are kept informed at every stage,” said a statement from the Minister’s Paris office. “The State will continue to ensure serious discussions [are held] with Ford and eventual buyers in order to verify the quality of offers which are made.

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