

# Germanwings crash: Details are clearer but motive remains unknown

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3 April 2015

Ten days after the crash of Germanwings flight 4U9525, recovery teams have located the second “black box,” the flight data recorder, of the Airbus 320. Brice Robin, the public prosecutor in Marseille, told a press conference that the discovery of the recorder constituted “an indispensable addition to understand what happened, especially in the final moment of the flight.”

The black box logged approximately 500 parameters. This includes data on speed, altitude, engines, the actions of the pilots and various control readings from the aircraft. “These facts are crucial to us in determining the truth,” said Robin.

Until now, only the first “black box,” the cockpit voice recorder had been analyzed. Those recordings indicate that when the pilot left the cockpit to use the restroom, copilot Andreas Lubitz locked him out and took control of the plane. According to statements by the French public prosecutor, the recordings prove that Lubitz intentionally altered the course of the flight, setting it on a collision course with a mountain. During this time he is supposed to have been breathing calmly and had possibly put on an oxygen mask.

These assumptions could be confirmed by the second black box. Investigators are especially hopeful for information that would reveal when and by whom the plane’s descent was initiated. This information could also clarify whether the copilot in fact locked the captain out on purpose, or if it was due to a malfunction of the door’s locking mechanism. The discovery of other technical problems is also possible.

Independently of the flight recorder’s information, the public prosecutor in Düsseldorf presented on Thursday new findings that suggest Andreas Lubitz had planned the alleged act in advance. On Thursday, authorities disclosed that a computer was found in the

home of the copilot which may have belonged to him. The browser history from March 16 through 23 contains several relevant search queries.

According to the prosecutor, one search “was concerned with medicinal treatments, another with information on methods for committing suicide. On at least one day, the person concerned spent several minutes grappling with search terms relating to cockpit doors and their security measures.”

While details about the crash itself are becoming clearer, the motive remains largely unexplained. On Monday, the Düsseldorf prosecutor announced that inquiries into the personal and professional life of Andreas Lubitz had “provided no viable information regarding a possible motive.”

However, there are indications of serious psychological problems. According to investigators, prior to obtaining a pilot’s license, Andreas Lubitz had been suicidal and spent a long time under psychiatric care. A press statement from the public prosecutor explained that “since then, and until recently, Lubitz had taken sick leaves for further visits to neurologists, psychiatrists and therapists, but suicidal tendencies or aggression toward others had not been confirmed.”

Tuesday evening, Lufthansa said that following an interruption in his training, Andreas Lubitz had informed the company’s flight school in Bremen that he had recovered from a serious depressive episode. He underwent a psychological examination in which nothing abnormal was found, and he was able to continue his training. For reasons of personal data protection, Germanwings—a Lufthansa subsidiary—was not informed of his medical history, said a company spokesperson.

By this point, investigators from the public prosecutor’s office had already found torn up doctor’s

notes in the copilot's residence that would have excused him from work on the day of the crash. Clearly, Andreas Lubitz wanted to hide his health problems from his employer.

There has been much unsubstantiated speculation in the press about the nature of Lubitz's illness. The *Bild* newspaper claimed that the investigation had shown that he had been involved in an auto accident ten days prior to the crash. It claimed he had gone to a doctor afterwards on account of problems with his vision.

Citing information from an unnamed European government official, CNN claimed that the copilot's girlfriend of many years had said he suffered from psychological problems.

However, the 26-year-old did not "know the extent of the problems." The couple had been "optimistic" that together they could cope with the health problems of the Germanwings employee. According to *Spiegel Online*, Lubitz's girlfriend had assumed that he was on his way to recovery.

In light of the fact that he was deemed fit to carry out his work and had a stable social life, the indications of possible psychological problems fail to explain his alleged act. Diagnoses of depression or bipolar disorder, which it has been assumed Lubitz suffered from, can indicate the possibility of suicidal planning, but have no direct relationship with the intentional and planned killing of 149 completely innocent people, most of whom were strangers to Lubitz.

Depression researcher and former head of the Max Planck Institute in Munich, Professor Florian Holsboer, explained on Monday on the German talk show "Tough but Fair," that sometimes a person diagnosed with depression will take the life of other people when he commits suicide, but these are normally close relatives. However, this was not the situation with the Germanwings flight. "Depressed people do not commit such acts," he said and suggested that a delusional idea could have played a role.

According to suicide expert Thomas Bronisch, even in cases of delusion, such acts are very rare. "If you consider everyone who has schizophrenia, the proportion who commit a serious crime or kill someone is smaller than the proportion in the average population. There is absolutely no evidence that psychologically disturbed people are fundamentally more dangerous," he said.

Even if a psychological diagnosis of the copilot were substantiated, it would only provide a description of his condition, not an explanation for his act. The killing of 149 innocent people defies a simple explanation. In the final analysis, it can only be explained in the context of a deeply brutalized and dysfunctional society.

This makes all the more remarkable the readiness of politicians and the media to use this disturbing act of violence to present quick solutions that amount to calls for increasing the power of the state apparatus.

The Germanwings crash has supposedly demonstrated the limitations of security measures taken at airports. Interior minister Thomas de Maizière announced on Thursday that identification would now be checked on all flights within Europe. The minister said that the crash had made it clear how little is known about passengers.

Demands to dismantle the right to patient confidentiality have gone even further. Christian Democratic Union traffic expert, Dirk Fischer, demanded a loosening of the confidentiality requirement for patients of certain professions: "Pilots must go to doctors dictated by their employers. These doctors must be exempt from the duty of confidentiality," said the *Rheinischen Post*.

The president of the pilot union Cockpit, Ilja Schulz, sharply denounced such plans in the same newspaper. "If my doctor were exempt from the duty of confidentiality, I would not tell him about any of my problems because I would be afraid of having my pilot's license revoked," Schulz said. "If the duty of confidentiality remains in place, on the other hand, a doctor can provide real help."

The president of the German Medical Association, Frank Ulrich Montgomery, also spoke against loosening the requirement. "Both patient secrecy, which is protected by the constitution, and the duty of doctors to keep patient information confidential are precious assets as well as a human right for all German citizens," said Montgomery.



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