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## EUROPE NEWS

# Germanwings Co-Pilot Andreas Lubitz Was Treated for Suicidal Tendencies

Co-pilot in plane crash had undergone therapy years before obtaining pilot license, German prosecutors say



State prosecutor's spokesman Christoph Kumpa speaks to journalists in front of the public prosecutor's office in Düsseldorf, Germany, on Monday. PHOTO: ROLF VENNERBERND/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

By **ANDREA THOMAS** and **ANDY PASZTOR**

Updated March 30, 2015 6:37 p.m. ET

**BERLIN**—The Germanwings co-pilot suspected of deliberately crashing an airliner into a mountainside last week had undergone psychotherapy years ago because of suicidal tendencies, a situation experts say is hard for airlines to detect.

In this case, the German prosecutor in charge said treatment had taken place before Andreas Lubitz, 27 years old at the time of the crash, obtained his commercial pilot license. While Mr. Lubitz had been under treatment, the prosecutors said, he hadn't exhibited suicidal or violent tendencies recently.

“A few years ago, the co-pilot had been in psychotherapeutic treatment with noted suicide risk over a long period before he gained his pilot license,” Düsseldorf prosecutor Ralf Herrenbrück said.

French and German investigators have been combing Mr. Lubitz’s life for clues about motives for what French prosecutors have said was his apparently deliberate decision on March 24 to lock Flight 9525’s more experienced pilot out of the cockpit and fly the airliner into an Alpine ridge at 400 miles an hour.

In recent years, U.S. airline officials have repeatedly confronted cases of severely



Andreas Lubitz taking part in a run on Sept. 13, 2009, in Hamburg, Germany. He underwent psychotherapy because of suicidal thoughts before obtaining his pilot license, German prosecutors said. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

depressed or otherwise emotionally unstable pilots killing themselves, though all those suicides occurred when aviators were off duty.

But in an interview, Bill Yantiss, an industry consultant and former head of safety and security at United Airlines, said passengers shouldn’t lull themselves into believing the Germanwings tragedy couldn’t be repeated in the U.S. or elsewhere.

“There probably are [members of] flight crews out there with the same mental state” as Mr. Lubitz, he said, and under certain circumstances they could snap. “The risk is out there,” Mr. Yantiss said. “It could certainly happen again.”

Under rules in Europe, the U.S. and most other places, pilots are largely on their honor to report any problems that arise between medical checks.

The prosecutor's statement confirms comments from a person close to the investigation last week, who said Mr. Lubitz had been treated for depression and had concealed his condition from his employer.

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could shed light on a perplexing gap in Mr. Lubitz's biography—a monthslong interruption in his pilot training a year after he enrolled in flight school in 2008.

The prosecutors said their investigation and interviews with witnesses had uncovered no sign that Mr. Lubitz was planning to deliberately crash an airplane. Neither could they establish a motive for such an act, they said.

Prosecutors had searched Mr. Lubitz's Düsseldorf apartment on Thursday, uncovering doctor notes that excused him from work over a period covering the day of the crash. His employer said it hadn't been aware of these notes.

The medical documents seized in the course of the investigation didn't suggest that Mr. Lubitz was suffering from any physical ailments, prosecutors said. A person close to the investigation said at the weekend Mr. Lubitz had consulted doctors in the weeks before the crash about vision problems that could have affected his ability to fly.

Guohua Li, director of Columbia University's Center for Injury Epidemiology and Prevention, described current medical standards for airline pilots as "outdated, inadequate and inconsistent," especially regarding mental-health assessment. "These standards need to be updated, strengthened and made internationally compatible."

As an example of what tighter standards can accomplish, Mr. Li said random alcohol and drug testing of U.S. pilots has virtually eliminated substance-impaired flying nationwide.

Deutsche Lufthansa AG, the parent company of Germanwings, has said it had no indication that Mr. Lubitz was suffering from depression or had any other mental

problems. But owing to German privacy protection rules, the airline knows only whether a pilot passed the physical and mental-fitness tests that are a prerequisite for flying.

Mr. Lubitz's medical certificate, last renewed in July 2014, showed he had an

unspecified medical condition requiring regular checks, according to Germany's Federal Aviation Office.

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## Andreas Lubitz: What We Know



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What we know about Andreas Lubitz, the co-pilot who appeared to intentionally crash Germanwings flight 9525 into a French mountainside last week, killing himself and 149 people on board.

“The only medical information we get from our pilots is the annual medical check, and it's a yes or a no,” a Lufthansa spokesman said.

—Shirley S. Wang contributed to this article.

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## Personality

He was a quiet, 27-year-old German who has a passion for gliders and competitive running, according to his employer and people who knew him.

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