

Switzerland in the foreign media: 1st quarter 2021

Full-face veil ban: some accusations of Islamophobia

Even in the run-up to the vote, the initiative for a full-face veil ban received regular coverage in the foreign media, especially in neighbouring countries and in the Islamic world. When it was adopted, the initiative generated an extraordinarily big media response worldwide. The result of the vote was often reported in a concise, factual and balanced manner. In more detailed commentaries, several newspapers criticised the result as Islamophobic, especially in neighbouring countries and in the

"Switzerland's crackdown on Islamic symbols is normalising anti-Muslim bigotry across the political spectrum"

Foreign Policy, USA

Islamic world. Only a few conservative media outlets welcomed the full-face veil ban. Criticism by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was given coverage. Meanwhile, on social media, commentary surrounding the vote was very polarised, with well-known right-wing politicians abroad welcoming the result.

COVID-19: open ski resorts and vaccination campaign

In January, the news was dominated by the decision to keep ski resorts in Switzerland open, in contrast to neighbouring countries. This was viewed very critically by most of the media. In February, the decision to relax measures for the first time this year, despite the fragile epidemiological situation, was given a great deal of critical coverage, especially in

«La Suisse est redevenue une championne de la rigueur»
(BFM TV, France)

the German-language media. The media also criticised the call for a "muzzle" on the scientific task force. Subsequently, however, the Swiss approach, viewed as unusual, was also seen by some to be a possible model for their respective countries. In several contexts, Switzerland's strategy during the first quarter was sometimes criticised as being too frugal: it was said that despite low levels of debt, the economic aid package was inadequate; that Switzerland had not invested in the development of vaccines despite its major pharmaceutical base; and that the easing of restrictions was motivated by short-term economic interests. Switzerland's vaccination strategy was also a source of interest and controversy.

Beny Steinmetz: trial and verdict judged historic

The trial of Israeli commodities trader Beny Steinmetz for corruption and the verdict against him at the Geneva Criminal Court received a great deal of coverage in foreign media, much of it paying tribute to the global efforts of Geneva's law

«Mais cette fois-ci, la justice va jusqu'au bout, c'est un signal fort»

(Libération, France)

enforcement authorities. Steinmetz's five-year prison sentence for corruption and the high compensation payments were seen as a landmark ruling for the

entire commodities sector. Overall, reporting promoted the image of a Switzerland committed to fighting corruption. Only a few media also reported criticism by a Swiss NGO, saying that Switzerland needs to close legal loopholes that facilitate criminal business practices.



Images of demonstrations accompany coverage of the adoption of the 'Yes to the burqa ban' initiative (© *The Independent*)



Poster for the initiative (© *Público*)

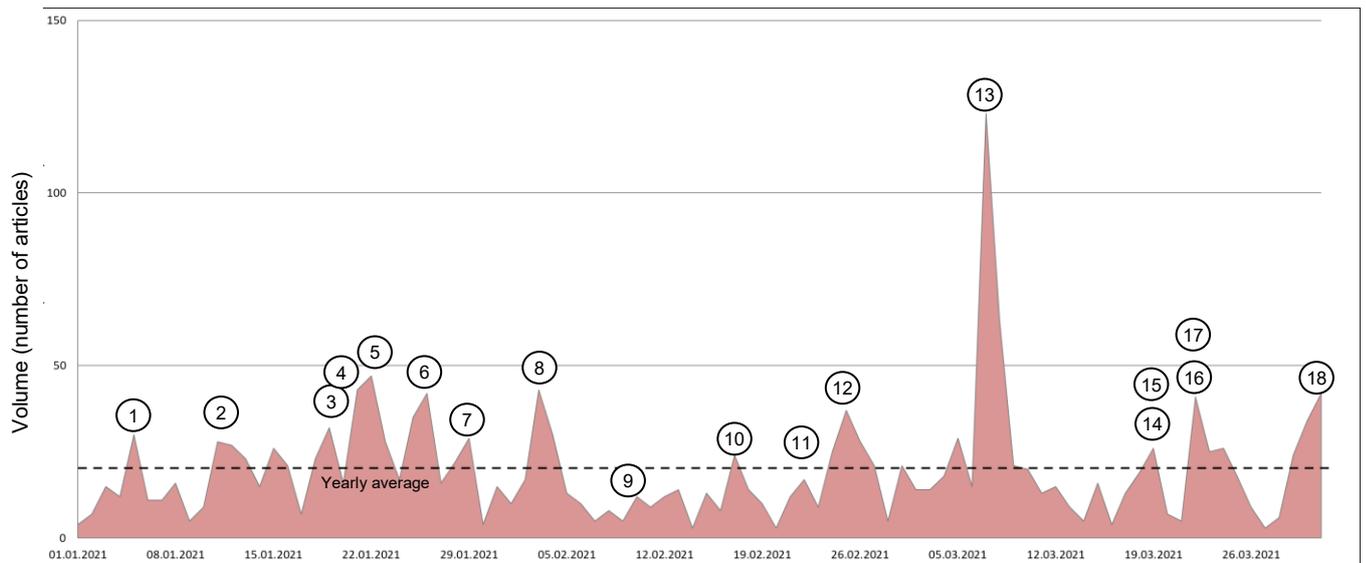


The COVID-19 situation in Switzerland is often illustrated by pictures of ski resorts (© *FAZ*)



Beny Steinmetz
(© *Süddeutsche Zeitung*)

Quantitative trends in foreign media coverage of Switzerland



Changes in the volume and tone of foreign media coverage of Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.01.2021 – 31.03.2021). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of their volume and significance.

(1) 100th anniversary of the birth of Friedrich Dürrenmatt (2) Trial of commodities trader Beny Steinmetz (3) Frozen assets of former Tunisian President Ben Ali (4) Investigation by the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland against the Lebanese Central Bank (5) Conviction of Beny Steinmetz in Geneva (6) Virtual World Economic Forum (7) Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in Geneva (8) COVID-19: non-approval of the AstraZeneca vaccine (9) 50th anniversary of women's suffrage (10) COVID-19: announcement of easing of restrictions (11) COVID-19: agreed easing measures (12) Death of the poet Philippe Jaccottet (13) Adoption of popular initiative 'Yes to a ban on full-face coverings' (14) Follow-up to the ban on full-face coverings (15) COVID-19: vaccination campaign (16) Publication of the federal government's China strategy (17) Mark Branson appointed new head of Germany's Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (18) Credit Suisse: expected losses in the billions

Focus: slow but steady – perceptions of Swiss equality

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Swiss women's suffrage in February, media from neighbouring countries and the UK in particular provided in-depth coverage of gender equality in Switzerland. According to them, although the situation of women in Switzerland has improved considerably since the 1970s, there is still a great need for action in many areas of life. Some of these include a traditional role model that is deeply rooted in society, differences in wages and pensions, and the low proportion of women in top management positions. In previous years, too, the issue of gender equality in Switzerland was repeatedly analysed by foreign media, with coverage peaking in June 2019, on the occasion of the women's strike. The focus of the media at the time was on the one hand on issues of wage inequality and inadequacies in the work-life balance in Switzerland, and on the other hand on the strength and presence of the Swiss women's movement. Media coverage at the time was extensive at a global level. A study published the same year by UNICEF on family-friendly policy, in which Switzerland ranked last in Europe, also received attention at the time. Foreign media also covered the issue of equality on the occasion of the National Council and Council of States elections in October 2019, which resulted in a sharp increase in the proportion of women in both chambers. In the context of the previous year's votes on increased protection for sexual minorities and on paternity leave, foreign media painted a picture of a nation that was making progress on equality issues but only slowly reaching the standards of neighbouring countries. The Swiss parliament's approval of the introduction of equal marriage met with a predominantly positive response worldwide.

«Es ist historisch peinlich, dass die Schweiz Frauen erst vor 50 Jahren das Wahlrecht gegeben hat. Doch inzwischen hat das Land eine Gleichstellungsbewegung, die ihresgleichen in Europa sucht.»
(Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany)

Monitoring the image of Switzerland in the foreign media covers all the reporting on Swiss-related topics in the leading media of 19 countries, including Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, the UK and the US as well as in the leading pan-Arab and EU media.

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