

Switzerland in the foreign media: 4th quarter 2021

COVID-19: polarisation and vaccine scepticism in the media spotlight

In the fourth quarter of 2021, three issues garnered particular attention in foreign media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland: the mobilisation of opponents to coronavirus measures, which was considered significant by international standards; Switzerland's low vaccination coverage compared with the rest of Western Europe; and the popular vote for the second referendum on the COVID-19 Act. In the run-up to the vote, the media also addressed the rising tensions between supporters and critics of the measures, as well as contrasting urban and rural vaccination coverage and scepticism. They sometimes presented rural German-speaking areas as particularly critical of science and the government. The international media saw the clear adoption of the COVID-19 Act as a sign of support for the government's coronavirus protection measures.

" Die Impfgegner in der Schweiz sind so laut und omnipräsent wie sonst nirgends in Europa: Im Kampf um Stimmen gegen die vergleichsweise milden Coronamassnahmen geben sie den Ton an."

Der Spiegel, Germany

rest of Western Europe; and the popular vote for the second referendum on the COVID-19 Act. In the run-up to the vote, the media also addressed the rising tensions between supporters and critics of the measures, as well as contrasting urban and rural vaccination coverage and scepticism. They sometimes presented



The closure of a restaurant in Zermatt for breaching coronavirus measures was also covered by international media. (© *Corriere della sera*)



The popular vote on the COVID-19 Act was also seen as polarising. (© *L'Express*)

Financial centre: major banks in the crosshairs of justice and the authorities

In the fourth quarter of 2021, international media reporting on the Swiss financial centre focused on events related to the banking giants UBS and Credit Suisse. Numerous media outlets reported on UBS's conviction by the Paris Court of Appeal for assisting in money laundering through tax evasion. Credit Suisse once again also received considerable negative coverage in the foreign press.

" Die Vielzahl der ebenso kostspieligen wie rufschädigenden "Unfälle" raubt einem den Atem, zumal sich diese über das gesamte Geschäftsspektrum der Credit Suisse ziehen."

(FAZ, Germany)

Further cases of the bank spying on its former employees emerged at the close of a FINMA enforcement procedure, with FINMA identifying serious breaches of supervisory law and imposing conditions on Credit Suisse. The media also reported on the conclusion of another FINMA enforcement procedure relating to the 'tuna bonds' loans scandal in Mozambique, focusing on FINMA's criticism of the banking giant and on the fines it paid to the US and UK. The intense media criticism could also have a negative impact on the reputation of the Swiss financial centre in general. Reporting also mentioned that Switzerland has an effective financial market supervisory authority, though this featured less prominently.



Reporting on major Swiss banks is mostly illustrated with stock images. (© *Wall Street Journal*)

Kunsthaus Zürich: Bührlé Collection provokes controversy

" La provenance douteuse des œuvres de la Collection Bührlé, qui s'est enrichi en vendant des armes au Troisième Reich, suscite la polémique en Suisse."

(Le Figaro, France)

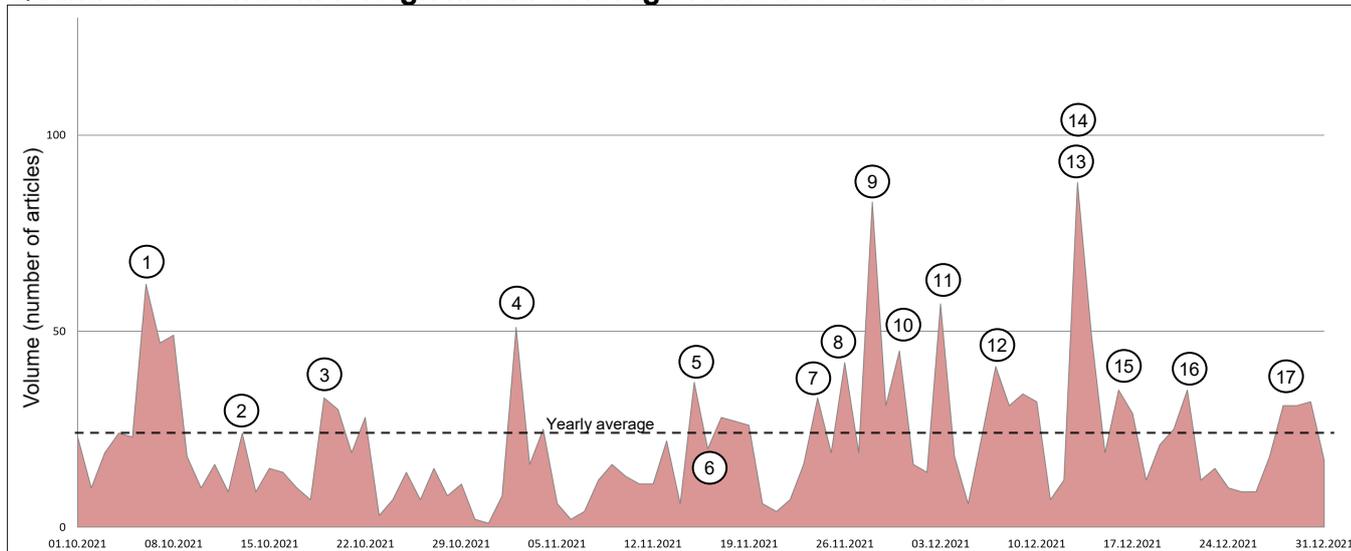
International reporting on the opening of the new extension to the Kunsthhaus Zürich in early October was dominated by the related exhibition of the controversial Bührlé Collection. The often negative coverage of the topic has continued beyond the end of the quarter; several months on, critics of the Kunsthhaus in particular are still being given ample room to express their views. In the media's assessment, the Kunstmuseum Bern has adopted a

better approach to dealing with potentially looted art.



The extension to the Kunsthhaus Zürich includes the Bührlé Collection. (© *FAZ*)

Quantitative trends in foreign media coverage related to Switzerland



Changes in the volume of foreign media coverage related to Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.10.2021 – 31.12.2021). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected based on their volume and significance.

(1) US-China high-level meeting in Zurich (2) Kunsthaus Zürich's approach to the Bührle Collection (3) Credit Suisse scandals (4) Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland opens criminal proceedings against Blatter and Platini (5) Reporting in run-up to popular vote on COVID-19 Act (6) Switzerland's qualification for football World Cup in Qatar (7) Reporting in run-up to popular vote of 28.11 on COVID-19 Act and justice and nursing initiatives (8) COVID-19: polarisation and vaccine scepticism (9) Popular vote: adoption of COVID-19 Act (10) COVID-19: travel requirements (11) COVID-19: changes to travel requirements (12) Reporting on alleged authorisation of Sarco suicide capsule in Switzerland (13) Geneva public prosecutor's office drops case against Juan Carlos I (14) Paris Court of Appeal issues judgment in UBS case (15) Extradition of Vladislav Klyushin (16) WEF postponed (17) Reporting on COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland

Focus: media coverage of a misleading story – the suicide capsule

Topics related to Switzerland continue to garner international attention even when their objective relevance is rather limited. Such topics often stand out because they are particularly emotional or surprising. In the fourth quarter of 2021 the news that the Sarco suicide capsule had allegedly been authorised under Swiss law was met with considerable interest. Media outlets around the world covered the story in detail and social media posts on the capsule were shared tens of thousands of times. A number of reports strongly criticised this alleged expansion of assisted dying in Switzerland, with some



Sarco suicide capsule (© WION)

media describing the capsule as inhumane. The catalyst for this media frenzy was the misleading headline of an interview with the machine's creator, published by Swissinfo in numerous international languages. However, widespread reports of the capsule's authorisation in Switzerland were incorrect; a potential Swiss authorisation had not been legally clarified. The example not only demonstrates the enormous reach of emotionally charged stories, it also shows that such stories can quickly take on a life of their own – and cannot be controlled or corrected once they do: Subsequent clarifications by Swissinfo and other international media outlets received little attention.

"I support assisted dying – but am appalled by Switzerland's suicide machine."
(The Independent, UK)

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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