

Switzerland in the foreign media: 1st quarter of 2024

War in Ukraine: planned peace conference met with interest

The organisation of a high-level peace conference in Switzerland, announced during the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in January, made headlines around the world. While reporting in the Western media was generally factual, it also strengthened Switzerland's visibility as a venue for dialogue and good

"Switzerland to host Ukraine peace summit at Zelenskyy's request"
(*The Hindu*, 16/01, India)

offices. Swiss solidarity with Ukraine also received much media coverage. Many articles appeared in the Russian media criticising the planned conference, primarily because of Russia's likely absence. Furthermore, some commentators questioned Switzerland's legitimacy as a host, arguing that it had abandoned its neutrality by accepting EU sanctions. These points of criticism were repeated at a meeting between Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the margins of a UN Security Council meeting, according to Russian media reports. In addition, Russian and Asian media reported repeatedly on the invitation to China extended by Mr Cassis. Up to the end of March, Western media only occasionally reported on Switzerland's role as conference host, and this coverage was factual. It was not until the Federal Council announced at the beginning of April that the conference would be held in June that Switzerland once again became a focus of global media attention.



Zelenskyy's visit and the announcement of a peace conference in Switzerland received much media coverage. (© FAZ)



Zelenskyy in dialogue with Swiss politicians. (© Izvestiya)

Switzerland and the EU: resumption of negotiations

Relations between Switzerland and the EU were a recurring theme throughout the quarter, particularly in neighbouring countries, following the adoption of the

"EU gibt der Schweiz neue Chance"
(*TAZ*, 18/03, Germany)

respective negotiating mandates and the subsequent start of negotiations. In terms of volume, however, reporting abroad remained limited. Media coverage of the proposed treaty package was largely factual, emphasising the economic benefits for Switzerland. However, given the wide-ranging domestic opposition in Switzerland to an agreement with the EU and the complex political system, there are numerous hurdles to a successful conclusion of the negotiations, according to the foreign media.



Resumption of negotiations between Switzerland and the EU (© Süddeutsche Zeitung)

Antisemitism: cases also reported in Switzerland

Against the background of a generally heightened sensitivity towards antisemitic incidents in the context of the Gaza war, foreign media also reported on the

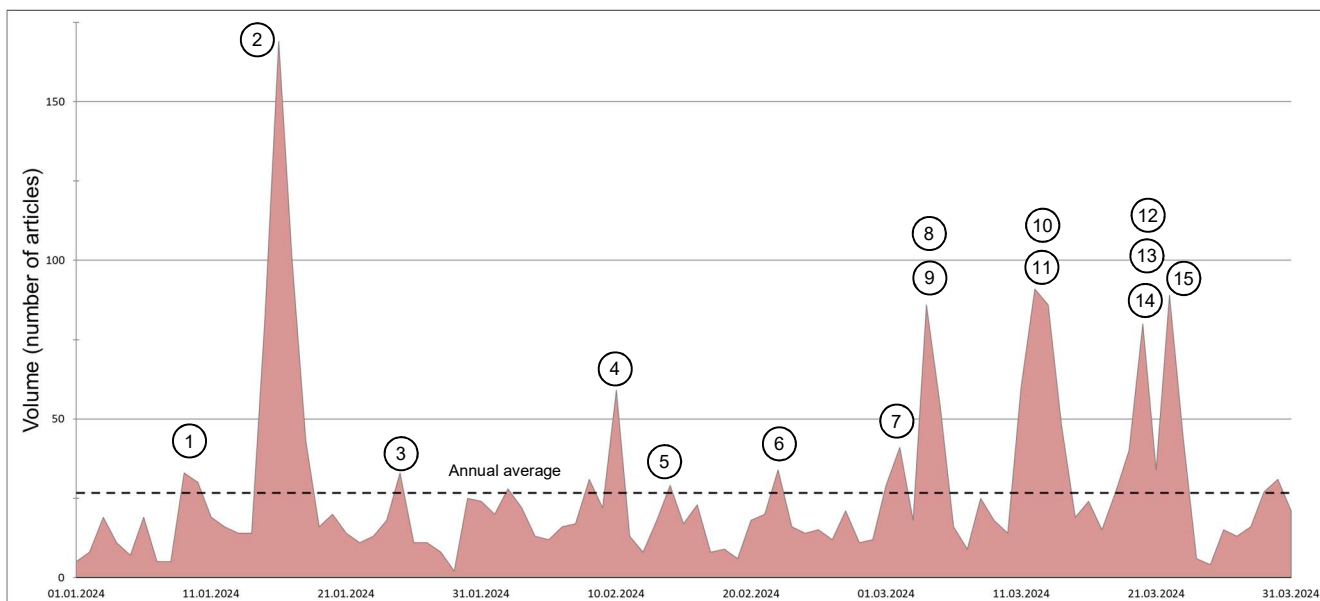
"A Davos, la Suisse face à l'escalade de l'antisémitisme"
(*Le Monde*, 05/04, France)

occurrence of such cases in Switzerland. One example surrounded accusations of antisemitism in connection with a notice posted by a mountain station in Davos, according to which Jewish guests would no longer be lent sports equipment due to negative experiences. Several reports pointed to similar previous incidents in Swiss touristic areas. A knife attack on an orthodox Jew in Zurich by a 15-year-old Swiss teenager with Tunisian roots also received a great deal of attention. The reporting remained mostly factual and Switzerland was not accused of being generally antisemitic. However, individual German media outlets discussed a study according to which antisemitic incidents in Switzerland had risen sharply in recent months.



Davos was at the centre of reporting on accusations of antisemitism in Switzerland. (© Süddeutsche Zeitung)

Quantitative trends in foreign media coverage related to Switzerland



Changes in the volume and tone of foreign media coverage related to Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.01.2024 – 31.03.2024). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of their volume and significance.

(1) Trial of Gambia's former interior minister at the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona (2) Visit by Zelenskyy to Switzerland and World Economic Forum in Davos (3) Russia comments on planned peace conference in Switzerland on the Ukraine war (4) Hostage-taking in Yverdon (5) Antisemitism allegations in Davos (6) Spanish request for legal assistance regarding Catalan separatists rejected (7) Resignation of SNB chairman (8) Knife attack on Orthodox Jew in Zurich (9) Federal vote: 13th OASI pension payment accepted (10) Ski touring accident in Valais (11) EFTA–India free trade agreement (12) Anniversary of UBS takeover of CS (13) Expulsion of identitarian speaker Martin Sellner (14) Start of negotiations between Switzerland and EU (15) SNB lowers key interest rate

Focus: Catalan separatism and Switzerland

Since the escalation in the conflict surrounding Catalan independence efforts in 2017, Spanish media have repeatedly mentioned Switzerland in their reporting on the subject. One reason for this is that Geneva in particular is seen as a refuge for the separatist movement. This reporting has intensified in recent months, which is partly due to the fact that the question of how to deal with the Catalan independence movement and its leaders is currently dominating and dividing Spanish domestic politics. Accordingly, the tone of the articles on Switzerland is mostly factual, but sometimes – depending on the topic in question and the particular media focus – also polarised. For example, some media close to the opposition accuse Switzerland of sympathising with the separatist movement.

"La Confederación Suiza es un lugar deseado por el independentismo porque juega a su favor contra España"
(ABC, 07/01, Spain)

Reporting therefore influences perceptions of Switzerland in Spain – either positively or negatively, depending on the attitude. In the quarter under review, the fact that the Federal Office of Justice did not grant a Spanish request for mutual legal assistance to locate a Catalan activist was of particular note. The criticism of this Swiss decision by the Spanish judge in charge, who is close to the opposition, was widely reported in the media. However, on social media the decision was also often welcomed and used to criticise the Spanish justice system. In connection with the negotiations between the Spanish government and protagonists of the Catalan independence movement, which took place in Geneva and were controversial in Spain, Switzerland was often mentioned, but received only little direct attention. Spanish media also covered other aspects of the story, depending on the latest developments, such as the case of a Catalan parliamentarian who fled to Switzerland to avoid potential prosecution.

Monitoring the image of Switzerland in the foreign media covers all the reporting on Swiss-related topics in the leading media of 19 countries – 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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