

Switzerland in the foreign media: 1st quarter 2020

COVID-19: bridging loans and ban on large-scale events

The foreign media covered the COVID-19 crisis in Switzerland as part of their intensive coverage of the global spread of the pandemic. The focus of the foreign media was on the countries most severely affected and on developments in their respective home countries. Switzerland's handling of the crisis also attracted some attention in the foreign media, however, especially in neighbouring countries. The ban on large-scale events, for example, which was imposed rather early on in

"Even Swiss people accustomed to the relative efficiency of their country have been surprised at the speed of its economic coronavirus counterattack"

Financial Times, UK

comparison with other European countries, was widely reported and was judged by some to be excessive and by others to be exemplary. Bridging loans for SMEs from private banks, guaranteed by the federal government, received quite a lot of attention, and as the procedure was seen as efficient and com-

mendable. There was also sporadic criticism of the Federal Council's actions, however, with some reporting that some of the measures to overcome the crisis should have been taken earlier. In neighbouring countries in particular, the situation on Switzerland's borders also received a great deal of attention, for example the border fence between Konstanz and Kreuzlingen. Other aspects that got covered were the high infection rate in Switzerland (although this was usually attributed to the high number of tests done) and the transfer of patients from France.

Crypto leaks: Swiss neutrality called into question

The CIA and the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) were reported to have intercepted messages from other states for decades using manipulated encryption devices made by the Swiss firm Crypto AG. This received global media coverage, with the focus usually on events in the respective country. Some reports, however, suspected that the Swiss authorities probably knew about what was going on for decades. Especially in English and German-speaking countries, some articles dealt in greater depth with the possible effects on Switzerland's reputation, with several foreign media outlets speculating that the revelations could jeopardise the perception of Swiss neutrality. According to some, this could possibly have a negative impact on Switzerland's good offices and the credibility of the Swiss export industry.

"The CIA used Crypto AG precisely because Switzerland's reputation for neutrality and quality would attract buyers in governments around the world. Switzerland took the money, and sold flawed machines"
(BBC, UK)

Extension of anti-discrimination law

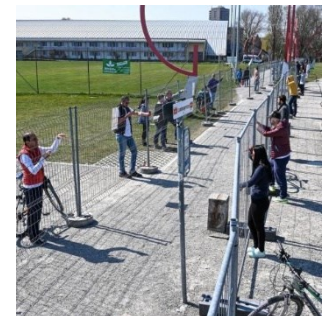
In February, the Swiss voted in favour of extending anti-discrimination law to include homosexuals and bisexuals, which attracted a lot of generally positive coverage in the media worldwide. It was, however, often pointed out that similar legislation has existed for some time in most Western countries. The topic generated a lot of lively discussion on social media, with related articles being shared extensively. Foreign celebrities and institutions generally endorsed the result of the vote on Twitter.

"Switzerland has long trailed behind most of its neighbors on LGBTQ rights"

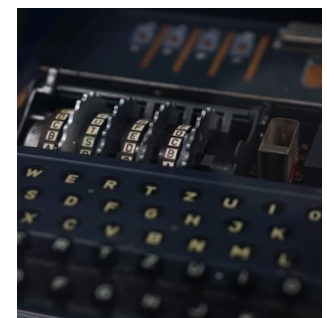
(New York Times, USA)



COVID-19: Light installation on the Matterhorn (© BBC)



COVID-19: The temporary border fence between Konstanz and Kreuzlingen (© Die Welt)

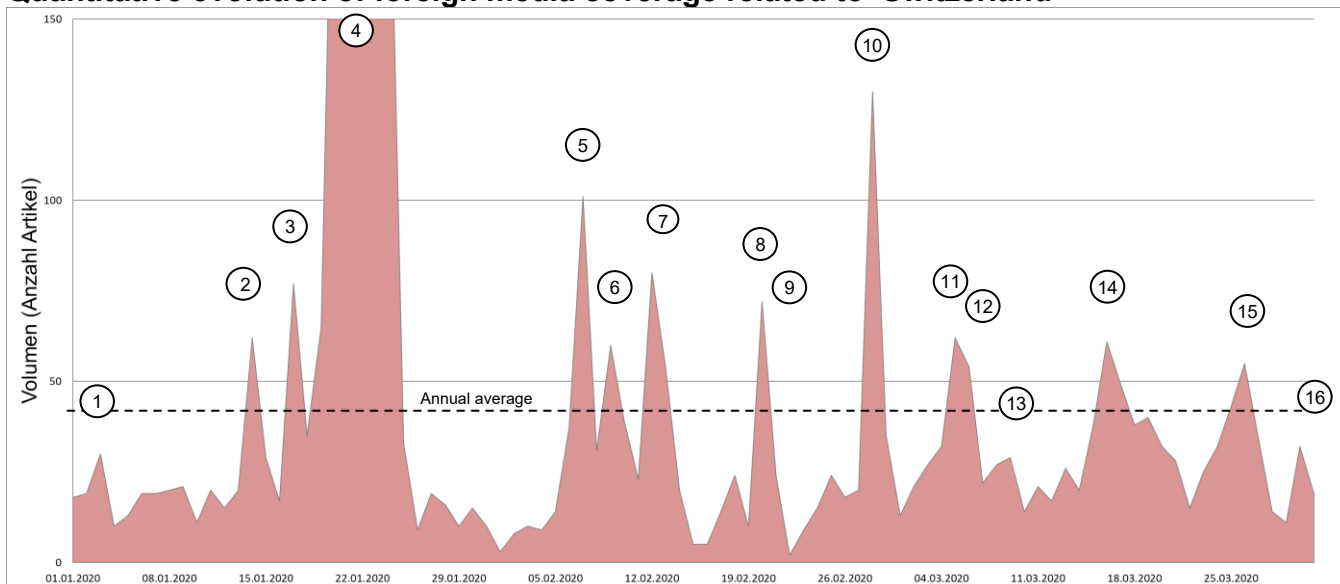


Encryption machines often serve as illustrations of crypto leaks (© La Croix)



Activists of the LGBTQ community celebrate the result of the vote. (© Repubblica)

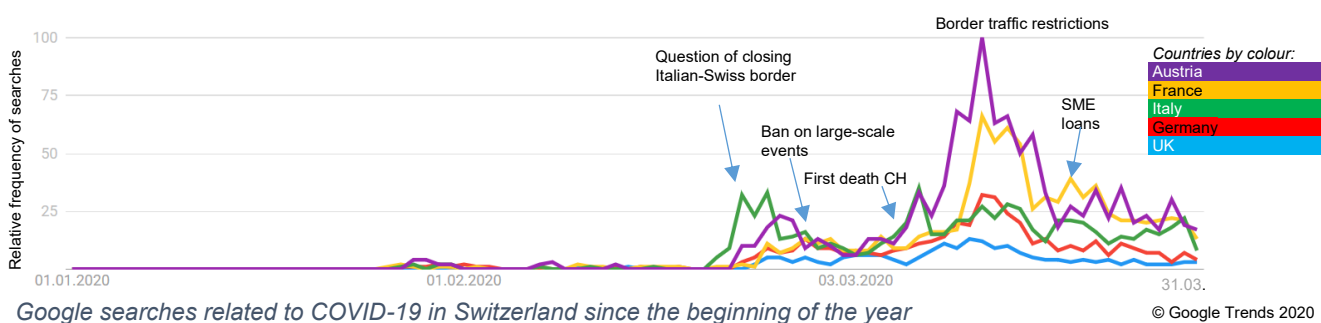
Quantitative evolution of foreign media coverage related to Switzerland



Evolution of the volume of foreign media coverage in connection with Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.01.2020 - 31.03.2020). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected based on their volume and significance.

(1) Swiss protecting power mandate in the conflict between the US and Iran (2) Acquittal for climate protesters (tennis stunt against Credit Suisse) and statement by Roger Federer (3) Run-up to the World Economic Forum WEF (4) WEF (5) Power struggle and resignation of CEO of Credit Suisse (6) Vote on anti-discrimination law (7) Crypto leaks (8) Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland brings charges against football officials Nasser al-Khelaifi and Jérôme Valcke on suspicion of corruption (9) Roger Federer's knee operation (10) COVID-19: ban on large-scale events (11) Affair involving Swiss bank accounts of former Spanish King Juan Carlos (12) 'Nazi' bank accounts in Argentina at Credit Suisse (13) 'Summer fairy tale' trial against German football officials at the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona (14) COVID-19: Federal Council declares extraordinary situation and closes borders ("lockdown") (15) COVID-19: Roger Federer's donation to Swiss families in need (16) COVID-19: Announcement of support measures for the Swiss economy

A closer look: interest abroad about COVID-19 in Switzerland



To what extent are people in neighbouring countries and the UK interested in the events and measures surrounding the COVID-19 crisis in Switzerland? An analysis of Google searches in the first quarter of 2020 shows that there was initial interest in Italy at the end of February, when the media discussed the possibility of a Swiss border closure. Interest peaked in mid-March when Switzerland and several neighbouring countries decided to impose restrictions on border traffic. Accordingly, interest within neighbouring countries was also strongest in the regions bordering Switzerland. From mid-March, interest tailed off again. Being directly affected by measures seems to have been the biggest factor influencing public interest, which explains why the peaks differ from those of media interest (which were during the ban on large-scale events, see above).

Switzerland's monitoring of foreign media includes all coverage in connection with Switzerland in reference media in 19 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, USA) in addition to reference media across the Arab world and in the European Union.
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