



Switzerland in the foreign media: 1st quarter 2019

Major media interest in the WEF

As in previous years, the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos attracted great international media interest. Attention was focused in particular on Donald Trump cancelling at short notice, the first visit from Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, and the appearance of Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. In addition, the foreign

«With globalisation under threat, there are a number of important reasons for welcoming the World Economic Forum this year»

The Independent, UK

press reported on other prominent individuals at the Forum, as well as the decision of several major heads of state not to attend. There was also critical coverage from some quarters, questioning the WEF's intention of improving the state of the world. These voices aside, reporting on the WEF conveyed the image of Switzerland as an important venue for international exchanges of opinion on business, politics, and the environment.

UBS conviction in Paris makes headlines around the world

The ruling of the Paris Tribunal de Grande Instance to fine UBS 3.7 billion euros for aiding and abetting tax evasion and money laundering attracted broad worldwide attention in the foreign press and on social media. Front-page reports highlighted the extraordinary high amount of the fine, described as the highest such penalty ever imposed for tax evasion by the French courts. The tonality of the coverage regarding UBS was neutral or negative. French and some German-language media did not limit their reporting to UBS, but also made references to the Swiss financial sector in general. While coverage generally saw the tax trial as the last major unresolved legal dispute from the bygone era of Swiss banking and pointed out the change in financial market policy in Switzerland, some reports called for even greater transparency and more cooperation on tax issues.

«Derrière l'affaire UBS, une longue croisade internationale contre le secret bancaire»

Le Figaro, France

Reports on the AfD donations scandal make Swiss connection

A number of Swiss-related developments connected with the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party's donations scandal, which came to light in 2018, attracted great attention, particularly in the German media. Many reports initially

«Die AfD und die Schweiz - immer wieder haben Funktionäre der Partei kostenlose Wahlkampfhilfe aus dem Alpenstaat erhalten»

ARD, Germany

concentrated on the identity of the donors thought to be behind a Swiss pharmaceutical company's contributions to the AfD. Their focus then shifted to the news that several AfD politicians had received unlawful campaign support in the form of services from Swiss advertising agency Goal AG. The media also picked up on a request for mutual legal assistance that was approved by the Zurich public prosecutor's office. Although attention was concentrated on AfD representatives and not primarily on Switzerland, ongoing media interest resulted in Switzerland being associated with illegal political campaign support and funds of dubious origin.



Alphorn players at the WEF opening ceremony (© Clarín, Argentina)



Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg at a WEF panel discussion (© Corriere della Sera, Italy)

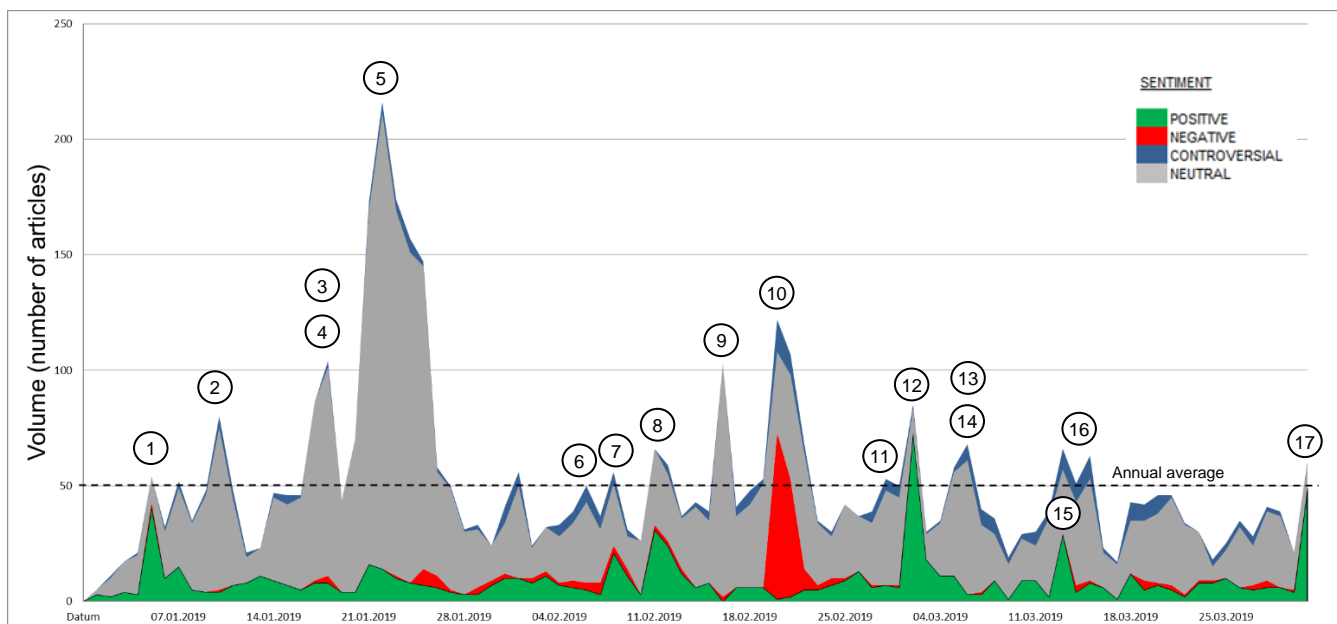


A gamble in France could cost UBS dear (© The Economist, UK)



AfD leader Jörg Meuthen under pressure owing to dubious donations from Switzerland (© Der Spiegel, Germany)

Quantitative evolution of foreign media coverage related to Switzerland



Evolution of the volume and sentiment of foreign media coverage in connection with Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.01.2019–31.03.2019). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of their volume and significance.

(1) Win for Roger Federer and Belinda Bencic in the final of the Hopman Cup. (2) Donald Trump cancels his attendance at the WEF in Davos. (3) Preparations for the WEF in Davos. (4) AfD donor scandal: donors behind the contributions from a Swiss pharma company. (5) WEF in Davos. (6) Gianni Infantino stands for re-election as FIFA President. (7) Achievements of Swiss athletes at the Alpine World Ski championships in Åre. (8) Signing of post-Brexit trade agreement between Switzerland and the UK. (9) Death of Swiss actor Bruno Ganz. (10) UBS: French court orders UBS to pay EUR 3.7 billion for aiding and abetting tax evasion and money laundering. (11) Mozambique sues Credit Suisse. (12) 100th ATP tour tournament win for Roger Federer. (13) Geneva Motor Show. (14) New 1000-franc note. (15) Swiss skier Beat Feuz wins Downhill World Cup. (16) AfD donor scandal: campaign support from Swiss advertising agency Goal AG and provision of mutual legal assistance by the Zurich public prosecutor's office. (17) Roger Federer wins the ATP tournament in Miami.

A closer look: coverage about new Swiss banknotes

The new series of banknotes issued by the Swiss National Bank is regularly the subject of coverage in the foreign media. In addition to the great importance of cash as a means of payment in Switzerland, interest focuses especially on the production and distribution of banknotes which, in an international comparison, have an extremely high value. This quarter, for example, it was the new 1000-franc note which took its turn in the international media spotlight. The launch of the new note attracted criticism from some commentators. In view of its high value, it is regarded as problematic, with the media emphasising the risk of its use for criminal ends in the context of tax evasion and money laundering. They also warned of potential damage to the reputation of the Swiss financial sector. Furthermore, the media alleged that the issue of a new 1000-franc note runs counter to the international trend, pointing out other currency areas which have abolished notes with such high values. Despite this controversy, Swiss banknotes also attract positive media attention abroad, their design and security are regularly highlighted as particular strengths. One example here is the International Bank Note Society's selection of the ten franc note as the banknote of the year in 2017, after the 50 franc note had taken the top spot in the same category in 2016. Repeated coverage of such awards and nominations creates positive associations between Swiss banknotes and the qualities of innovation, striking design and high security standards.

Switzerland's monitoring of foreign media includes all coverage in connection with Switzerland in reference media in 18 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, India, 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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