

Switzerland in the foreign media: 4th quarter 2020

COVID-19 pandemic: criticism of handling of second wave

Foreign press coverage of Switzerland's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was more critical during the second wave than in the first wave. In neighbouring countries, especially, the media expressed surprise at Switzerland's relatively relaxed measures, despite the country's very high prevalence of the disease. From mid-October onwards, the sharp increase in case numbers and isolated superspreader events, such as the yodelling concert in the canton of Schwyz, attracted attention. From November, the decision to keep Swiss ski resorts open over the festive period, even though neighbouring countries were closing theirs, proved to be highly controversial. Some reports and commentators felt that the decision showed a lack of solidarity and undermined the efforts of Switzerland's neighbours to contain the pandemic. At

"Switzerland Is Choosing Austerity Over Life: Why Switzerland became one of the world's worst coronavirus hotspots"
(*Foreign Policy*, USA)

the end of December, British skiers' response to a quarantine order, which had retrospectively been imposed by the authorities, generated a great deal of interest around the world. While most of the coverage in other countries kept to the facts, certain reports in the UK media were critical of Switzerland.

Throughout the 4th quarter, some highly critical press reports from neighbouring countries also expressed incomprehension at the 'Swiss way' and Switzerland's failure to take sufficient measures, given the extremely high per-capita infection rate, overstretched hospitals and high death toll. The reports stressed the role of Switzerland's federal system and the trade-off between public health and material wealth. A few articles took a different line, responding positively to the temporary drop in case numbers in November before they stabilised again. Outside Europe, the press reported matter-of-factly on various events relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Covid : cacophonie générale en Suisse"
(*Le Point*, Frankreich)

Vote on Responsible Business Initiative

The referendum on the Responsible Business Initiative attracted a great deal of attention across the world. The coverage pointed out that even though the initiative failed to win support in a majority of Swiss cantons as required, voters backed the initiative by a narrow majority. Some reports interpreted this as signalling a change in political attitudes, as trade associations never had problems in the past getting Swiss voters to accept their arguments. To some extent, the high level of support for the initiative was also interpreted as emanating from similar efforts in other countries to review and regulate the environmental and social responsibility aspects of global supply chains. The press coverage also referred to the large number of multinationals operating in Switzerland.

"Dass eine Mehrheit der Bevölkerung einem Volksbegehren zustimmt, das so klar den Interessen der mächtigen Konzerne und Wirtschaftsverbände widerspricht und die Moral in den Vordergrund stellt, ist für das Land etwas Neues."
(*Spiegel*, Deutschland)



COVID-19: Crowd of people waiting for a ski lift (© RAI)



COVID-19: coverage focusing on open ski resorts (© BBC)

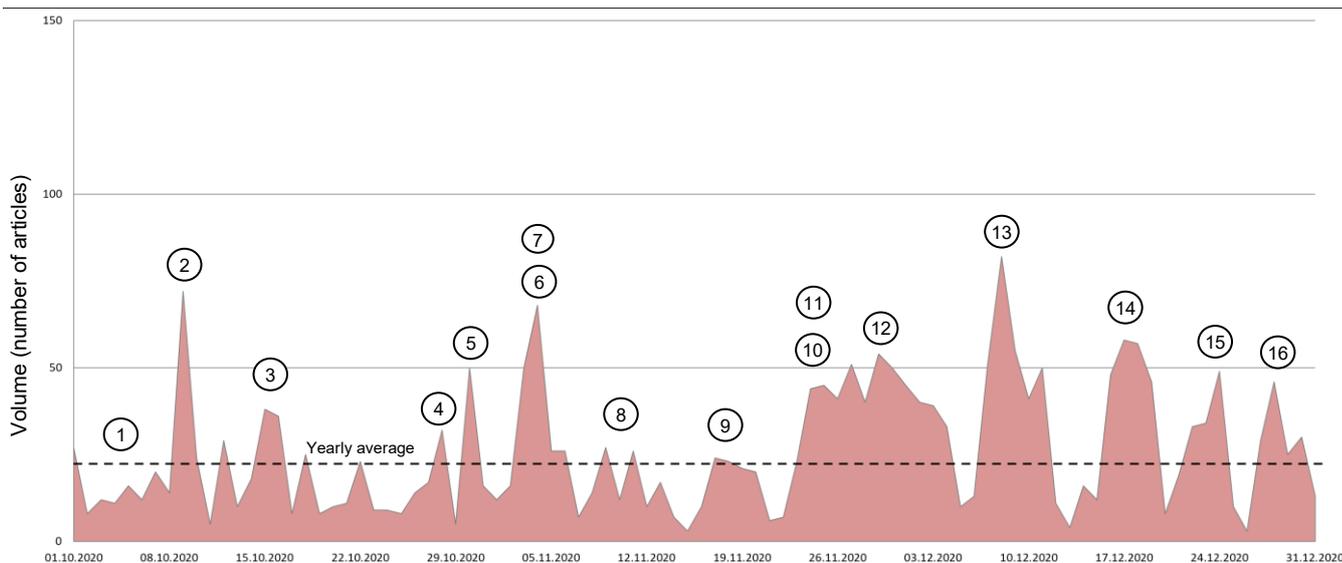


COVID-19: statements by Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer were widely reported



Posters publicising the Responsible Business Initiative (© *Le Figaro*)

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, 01.04.2020 - 30.06.2020). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected based on their volume and significance.

(1) Racism experienced by former Credit Suisse CEO Tidjane Thiam (2) COVID-19: sharp increase in case numbers, superspreader yodelling concert (3) COVID-19: continuing high case numbers with only moderate measures (4) COVID-19: superspreader events and announcement of new measures (5) FIFA: Valcke and Al-Khelaifi trial (6) Vienna attack: arrests in Winterthur (7) COVID-19: more than 10,000 new infections in one day, partial lockdown in Geneva (8) COVID-19: use of intensive care unit resources, criticism of the 'Swiss way' (9) COVID-19: situation in intensive care units, criticism of moderate measures from neighbouring countries (10) COVID-19: winter tourism strategy, bottlenecks in hospitals (11) Knife attack in Lugano (12) Vote on Responsible Business Initiative (13) COVID-19: WEF 2021 move to Singapore, suspension of rail services between Switzerland and Italy, announcement of new measures (14) Accusation of currency manipulation (15) Swimmer Sun Yang's doping ban by CAS set aside by Federal Supreme Court (16) COVID-19: quarantine rule violations by British tourists

In focus: Swiss literature as seen by foreign media

The 30th anniversary of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's death in December and, in particular, the centenary of his birth at the beginning of January attracted significant media attention in other German-speaking countries. Nearly all German-language media, including local media, paid extensive tribute to Dürrenmatt's life and work, pointing out that he had become an integral part of the German teaching curriculum as one of the most important literary figures in the German-speaking world, and that his work was of great relevance still today. There were also media reports on Dürrenmatt in some other countries. The Zurich writer Lukas Bärfuss also attracted attention in the German media, which frequently included reviews of his work or quoted the critical remarks he made on Swiss politics and society. Bärfuss garnered significant attention also in the non-German-language media in July 2019, when he won the Georg Büchner Prize, the most prestigious German literary award. Reports hailed him as one of the most important contemporary German-language playwrights. Younger Swiss writers also continued to attract attention abroad. In the fourth quarter, for example, Dorothee Elmiger received very favourable reviews

"An Muschgs selbstverständliche Verbindung von literarischer Ambition und politischem Engagement knüpft Bärfuss ausdrücklich an und setzt damit eine einflussreiche Schweizer Tradition seit den Zeiten von Max Frisch und Friedrich Dürrenmatt fort."
(*Die Welt*, Deutschland)

in both the Austrian and German media, which paid tribute to her unorthodox, poetic and political work. The reports expressed the view that she had deservedly been nominated for a number of book prizes. Meanwhile, French media reports frequently referred to the fact that Geneva-based Joël Dicker has become one of the best-selling contemporary writers in France. Some of his works are set in Switzerland, giving readers a better understanding of the country.

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. Contact: FDFA, Presence Switzerland, Monitoring and Analysis Section, Bundesgasse 32, 3003 Bern Tel. +41 58 462 01 83, email prs@eda.admin.ch, <http://www.fdfa.admin.ch/presenceswitzerland>