

Switzerland seen from abroad in 2022

15 December 2022



Switzerland's positioning with regard to the war in Ukraine was the issue that defined Switzerland's image abroad in 2022. In July, Swiss President Ignazio Cassis welcomed Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal to the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano.

KEY POINTS IN BRIEF

- The following report provides an overview of Switzerland's image abroad in 2022. It is based on an analysis of foreign media coverage as well as the perceptions that the general public in other countries have of Switzerland. Although international reporting on Switzerland was critical at times, the country's image abroad has largely remained very positive and stable.
- In 2022, the war in Ukraine dominated the global news agenda, and positions that countries adopted to the conflict heavily shaped their national image abroad. This was also evident in international reporting on Switzerland. Switzerland's neutral status and policy on neutrality were the subject of particularly intense media scrutiny. The coverage, which was critical at times, focused principally on Switzerland's decisions in relation to sanctions and the export of arms and ammunition.
- Switzerland's position with regard to the war in Ukraine also influenced how it was perceived by the general public abroad. For example, neutrality was associated more strongly with Switzerland than in previous years but was viewed less positively.
- The Swiss financial centre figured in international reporting and the perception that the general population in other countries have of Switzerland. Foreign media coverage of stories like the "Suisse secrets" data leak was critical at times. However, the focus of reporting shifted in the second half of 2022 to stories surrounding individual companies. As a result, critical media coverage did not have a strong negative effect on the public perception of the Swiss financial centre abroad.
- Political affairs which had come to the fore last year continued to dominate foreign media coverage of Switzerland. Switzerland's positioning in the world attracted considerable media interest. This led to greater visibility of related issues in the public perception of Switzerland abroad. Switzerland's perceived solidarity, or lack thereof, now plays a more important role in shaping its image abroad.

Overview

Presence Switzerland, which is part of the General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (GS-FDFA), is mandated with monitoring the image that other countries have of Switzerland. Its findings help shape Switzerland's communication abroad. This report analyses foreign media coverage and the public perception of Switzerland abroad. It is divided into two parts. The first deals with the **portrayal of Switzerland in the foreign press and social media abroad**. The central question here is to what extent and how Switzerland was covered and presented to the public by the media, which tends to be strongly driven by current events. The second part of the report deals with the **public perception of Switzerland abroad**. The results are based on a representative population survey which Presence Switzerland regularly conducts in 18 countries to ascertain the image that the public abroad have of Switzerland based on a pre-defined set of topics. The combination of these two perspectives makes it possible to identify similarities and differences, as well as correlations between media coverage and changes in public perception.

The first segment of the report demonstrates that Switzerland's position with regard to the war in Ukraine was the primary focus of international media coverage in 2022. Swiss neutrality and its neutral policy on specific issues like sanctions and the export of arms and ammunition have been the subject of intense and sustained media scrutiny since the start of the conflict

in February 2022. Political affairs which had come to the fore the previous year continued to dominate foreign media coverage of Switzerland. Of course, the topics covered vary depending on current events. For example, Swiss-EU relations featured heavily in foreign media coverage last year but much less in 2022, as the global news cycle was dominated by the war in Ukraine. Other topics covered by the foreign media included energy supplies, the Swiss financial centre and the “Suisse secrets” customer data leak, as well as Switzerland’s low inflation rate and other stories involving Credit Suisse. Overall, the volume of foreign media coverage in 2022 was on a par with the previous year.

In terms of public perception, the analysis found that Switzerland’s image abroad remains impressively positive and stable overall. It also shows that the issue of neutrality played a more prominent role in shaping public perception of Switzerland abroad than in previous years, and was also regarded more critically.

Switzerland through the eyes of the foreign press and social media

Swiss neutrality: high on the international media agenda



The positions and decisions adopted by Switzerland in connection with the **war in Ukraine** have been a recurrent theme of foreign reporting since February 2022. Coverage frequently focused on Swiss **neutrality** and its neutral policy, and how these informed the country’s response to events in Ukraine. Media criticism of neutrality was prompted by concrete decisions by Switzerland which other countries perceived as self-interested. There was a high volume of reporting on these issues, particularly in Europe and in the English-speaking world. Interest among Russian media outlets has increased since summer. Foreign media reporting can be divided into four phases.

The first is right after the war broke out. The Swiss decision to adopt EU sanctions against Russia only through measures aimed at preventing their circumvention was met with incomprehension in the media. Especially on social media, the comments on the decision were very critical and sparked heated debate, with certain sections slamming Switzerland’s decision as immoral because they felt it prioritised profit over human lives.

The second phase covers the subsequent decision to adopt EU sanctions in full, which was widely hailed around the world. Many media outlets – and US President Joe Biden in his State of the Union address – pointed out that “even Switzerland” had joined the sanctions regime. The media also mentioned that Switzerland manages a lot of Russian assets, explaining that this is also a reason why its sanctions decision was important. In some cases, **reporting gave the impression that Switzerland had abandoned its neutral stance**. This was due to either a lack of understanding or an oversimplification of the facts. Other media outlets adopted a more nuanced approach to the discussion on whether sanctions were compatible with Switzerland’s neutral status.

The third phase began in mid-March. Several media outlets outside Russia were once again critical of Switzerland, accusing it of **slow-walking the implementation of sanctions**. Calls by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for Switzerland to block the assets of Russian oligarchs attracted a great deal of media interest. The foreign press also reported on the important role that Switzerland plays in relation to Russian oligarchs and the trading of Russian gold on the commodities market. Regarding the much-discussed topic of Russian oligarchs and the handling of their assets, critical media reporting, particularly in Europe, painted Switzerland’s neutral status as an opportunistic means for furthering economic self-interest.

The fourth phase, which is still ongoing, began at the end of April. Foreign media outside Russia featured reports that discussed **Swiss neutrality as a security policy concept and as an obstacle to providing support to Ukraine**. Switzerland's refusal to allow other countries to re-export Swiss-made military equipment, especially ammunition, to Ukraine, a decision based on its neutral status and war materiel legislation, repeatedly drew heavy criticism. In social media, especially, some accounts with a large following loudly attacked Switzerland for its lack of solidarity, painting it as an unreliable partner of the Western alliance. The Swiss position on security policy also came under scrutiny with the announcement by Finland and Sweden of their intention to join NATO. With frequent references to Switzerland's internal political debates, foreign media outlets discussed the extent to which the Swiss understanding of neutrality should be adapted to reflect the new global peace and security order. The questioning of the appropriateness of neutrality as a security policy concept came primarily from media outlets outside Russia. In contrast, there was only very scant media coverage of the concrete action taken by Switzerland to support Ukraine, such as 100 million Swiss francs in aid as part of the Winter Aid Action Plan. In contrast to the previous year which included the Biden-Putin summit in Geneva, there was little positive media coverage of Swiss neutrality in 2022. Since the end of April, the volume of reporting on Switzerland by Russian media outlets has increased and grown more critical. Russian media has accused Switzerland of losing all credibility as a neutral country by adopting the sanctions against Russia in full, which it considers disqualifies Switzerland from exercising a Russia-Ukraine protecting power mandate.

The Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano also attracted some interest from the international media. Reporting focused mostly on the content and topics covered at the event. President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis appeared in a number of guest contributions in leading international media outlets, helping to give visibility to Switzerland's position on its neutrality and how this is implemented. The media also reacted to the news that Switzerland was allegedly refusing to take in Ukrainian war casualties out of concern for its neutrality. The recommendation, often misinterpreted by foreign media as an official government decision, came in for heavy criticism in press articles and on social media, while the subsequent admission of casualties was unable to undo the damage. Meanwhile, the Federal Council decision in September to maintain the current direction of Switzerland's policy of neutrality met with little media response outside Russia.

In 2022, the Swiss financial centre and in particular Credit Suisse also once again attracted a great deal of interest from the international media. In February, Credit Suisse was alleged to have helped corrupt politicians, officials and criminals to launder money and avoid taxes.

Many media outlets around the world carried this "**Suisse secrets**" story, which was based on their coordinated analyses of information on Credit Suisse clients that had been leaked to them. Reporting focused on the bank itself as well as on prominent figures from all over the world whose possibly corrupt and illicit financial activities were brought to light using their leaked account data. The media outlets which broke the story also expressed criticism of the Swiss financial centre and Swiss banking legislation in their reporting. They called out Swiss legislation for severely restricting the freedom of journalists working in Switzerland to report on the Swiss financial centre and potentially illegal practices, and pointed out that Switzerland still does not maintain an automatic exchange of information with many countries which are particularly prone to corruption.

The "**Suisse secrets**" story was far from the only source of negative headlines and critical reporting about **Credit Suisse** in 2022. Foreign media outlets also covered the conviction of Credit Suisse by the Swiss Federal Criminal Court for laundering money on behalf of a Bulgarian organised crime ring. In autumn, there was widespread and mostly critical international coverage of the sharp fall in the Credit Suisse share price and rumours of potential repercussions on the global financial system. Reporting on the major bank's announcement of a new strategy and investment from Saudi Arabia was similarly unfavourable. Other court cases and settlements involving the



Swiss **financial centre** which attracted international media interest in 2022 include the trial of Pierin Vincenz, the former CEO of the bank Raiffeisen, and a ruling by the Paris Court of Appeal in December 2021 against UBS for aiding and abetting the laundering of the proceeds from tax fraud.

Switzerland's **inflation rate** – relatively low by international standards – had regularly been the subject of positive international media coverage since early April 2022. Reporting cited the strong franc and greater resilience to global energy price fluctuations as two key reasons. The decision of the Swiss National Bank to tighten its monetary policy, including an increase in its policy interest rate, was hailed by the foreign media as surprising and bold.



The war in Ukraine also led to greater media interest in the **energy supply issue**. Foreign media outlets also ran articles specifically about the energy situation in Switzerland. This coverage can be divided into three categories.

The first type of coverage focused on whether Switzerland has the appropriate contingency plans in place to deal with energy shortages. Some media in neighbouring countries claimed that Switzerland needed to do more, because it is dependent on imports of electricity from abroad during the winter months and is therefore reliant on the solidarity of its European neighbours. Reporting on state aid for Axpo was largely matter-of-fact.



The second category of reporting centred on the possible consequences of an energy shortage in Switzerland, with some outlets claiming that it could lead to civil unrest. These reports were carried very widely, and almost exclusively, by Russian media outlets.

The third category concerned energy-saving measures and penalties for non-compliance. The suggestion by Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga that people shower together in order to save energy elicited some amusement and considerable coverage among the foreign media. Provocative stories on the energy issue, for example the distorted news that Swiss people might be jailed for heating their homes above a certain temperature, were taken up by both traditional outlets and social media. At the same time, an inaccurate story did the rounds on social media, claiming that the Swiss government was calling on people to report anyone who was overheating their home to the authorities in return for a reward.

This year, the foreign media paid much less attention to **Swiss-EU relations** than in the previous year. Nonetheless, there were a few isolated, critical reports in the German and French media. In February, the Stick to Science campaign also prompted discussions on social media about Switzerland's status as a non-associated third country in the Horizon Europe programme. In November, European media especially discussed the extent to which the Swiss model could be applied to relations between the UK and the EU. These reports mostly presented the relationship between Switzerland and the EU as complicated. Although generally relations between Switzerland and the EU were rarely addressed explicitly by the media in 2022, there were oblique references in the coverage of other matters which touch on the issue, such as possible energy shortages and sanctions in the context of the war in Ukraine.



In addition to the above topics which received regular international media coverage, several **other events** helped to shape the foreign media’s perception of Switzerland in 2022. The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** in Davos attracted a lot of attention, although much less than in previous years. The **closure of Swiss airspace** due to a technical malfunction at the air navigation provider Skyguide garnered a great deal of foreign media interest. The decision on the future siting of a new Swiss **repository for radioactive waste** near the German border attracted a high volume of media coverage in German-speaking countries and beyond. Some claimed that the decision had left locals feeling uneasy and had caught the German political establishment off guard. Others reported that the Swiss authorities were trustworthy and the decision-making process had been transparent and inclusive. The acquittal by the Federal Criminal Court of the former presidents of **FIFA** and UEFA, Joseph Blatter and Michel Platini respectively, received a relatively high volume of coverage. The **meetings** in January of the US and Russian deputy foreign ministers and US and Russian foreign ministers in Geneva attracted some media attention. The election of Switzerland and other countries to the **UN Security Council** did not elicit much media coverage, although in Switzerland’s case these reports did tend to connect the news with the issue of Swiss neutrality. In contrast to previous years, there was very little international reporting on **federal popular votes** in Switzerland. Media in neighbouring countries in particular did, however, cover the election of Federal Council members by the Swiss Parliament on 7 December.



This year’s record high **glacier melt** in Switzerland received global media coverage. Several Swiss studies garnered a great deal of attention: they showed that glaciers in Switzerland have lost a full 6% of their volume this year alone and half of their volume in the last 85 years. Numerous foreign media outlets also focused on the visible effects of the glacier melt, such as a mountain pass being ice-free for the first time in over 2,000 years, the shifting of the border between Switzerland and Italy, and the human remains and objects which were uncovered due to the receding ice cover. A number of articles addressed the glacier issue in terms of its implications for Switzerland’s national heritage, or emphasised the importance of Swiss glaciers for the European water supply. The global importance of climate change issues was one reason for the extensive media coverage. The iconic status of glaciers as a symbol of the Alps and the fact they may soon be gone also played a role. An indirect and positive outcome of the high volume of reporting was global recognition of the quality of Swiss research.



Swiss **arts and culture** events and news stories were also covered by the foreign media in 2022. The coverage tended to focus on developments in the Swiss art world that feed into the broader global societal debate. One example was the debate surrounding looted art claims. The critical coverage of the Kunsthhaus Zürich in 2021 carried over into 2022. Reporting contrasted the actions of the Zurich museum with those of the Kunstmuseum Bern. Media accounts of the agreements to return cultural artefacts to Egypt and Turkey were objective in tone. Foreign media expressed incomprehension at the decision to cancel a number of concerts in Bern and Zurich following accusations of cultural appropriation. Although Swiss arts and culture did not attract much foreign media coverage, the reporting – for example, on the Swiss television series “Tschugger” and the new “Plateforme 10” museum quarter in Lausanne – was mostly positive. The awarding of the German Book Prize to Swiss author Kim de l’Horizon from Switzerland attracted a lot of international media attention, not least because they are the first non-binary winner of the prize. Reporting addressed both the social and literary significance of the decision. The death of the French-Swiss director Jean-Luc Godard also attracted a great deal of foreign media coverage.

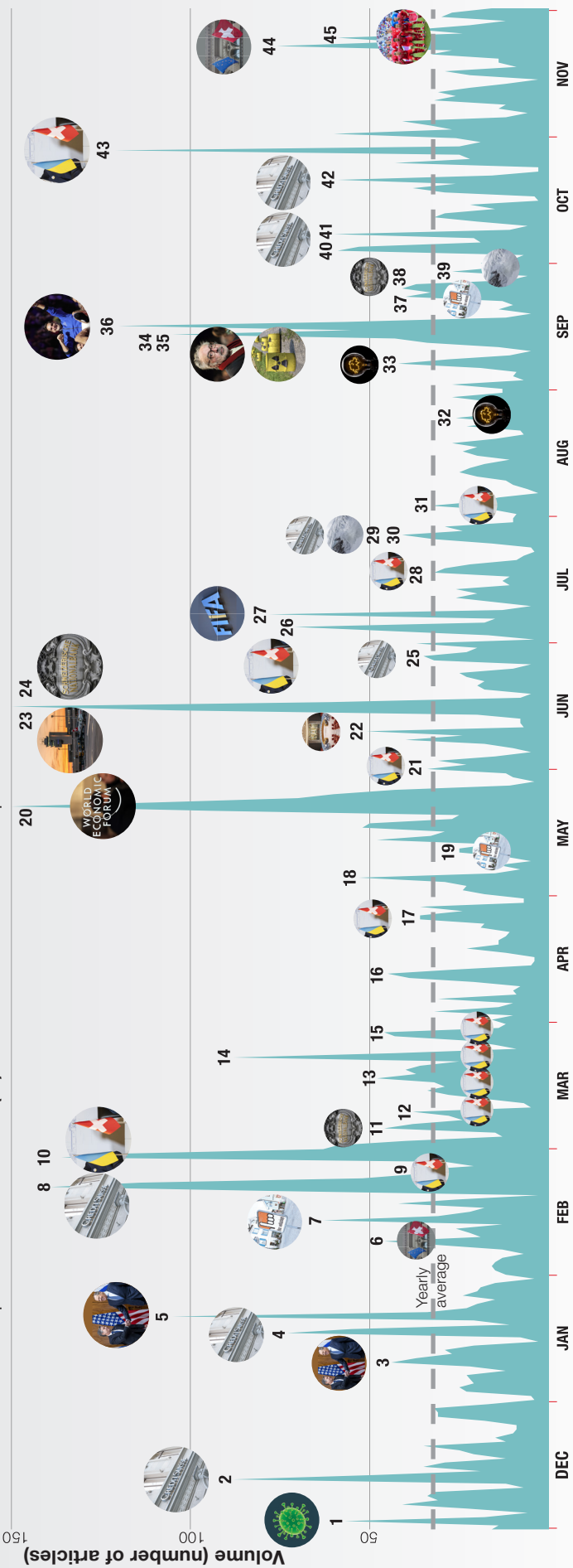


There were somewhat fewer sports-related headlines in 2022 than in previous years. The retirement of the Swiss tennis player Roger Federer received the most attention. In addition to his outstanding sporting achievements, the foreign media also paid tribute to his personality. The Swiss national football team qualifying for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar also garnered some interest.



Quantitative evolution of foreign media coverage related to Switzerland (dec. 2021 – nov. 2022)

(1) Covid-19: entry regulations for Switzerland (2) Verdict of the Paris Court of Appeal in the UBS trial (3) Meeting of US and Russian deputy foreign ministers in Geneva (4) Credit Suisse: resignation of Chairman of the Board (5) Meeting of US and Russian foreign ministers in Geneva (6) Horizon Europe and 'Stick to Science' campaign (7) Swiss referendums of 13.02. (ban on animal experiments, tobacco advertising, stamp duty, basic rights for non-human primates in BS) (8) 'Suisse secrets': Credit Suisse client data leak (9) War in Ukraine: Swiss decision to adopt EU sanctions against Russia solely through measures aimed at preventing their circumvention (10) War in Ukraine: adoption of full EU sanctions against Russia; Swiss neutrality (11) Swiss franc rises above parity with the euro (12) War in Ukraine: criticism of Swiss hosting of commodities trading; adoption of further EU sanctions (13) War in Ukraine: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky demands that Switzerland block Russian oligarchs' assets (14) War in Ukraine: Russian assets worth CHF 6 billion frozen (15) War in Ukraine: criticism of sanctions implementation (16) Kidnapping of head of Swiss Vaccination Commission (17) War in Ukraine: Switzerland blocks Germany's ammunition delivery to Ukraine (18) Cocaine found in Nespresso factory (19) Referendum of 15.05.22 ('Netflix levy', organ donations, Frontex) (20) WEF in Davos (21) War in Ukraine: Switzerland blocks delivery of Swiss-made tanks from Denmark to Ukraine (22) Switzerland elected to UN Security Council (23) Swiss airspace closed after technical malfunction at Skyguide (24) SNB raises policy interest rate (25) Credit Suisse found guilty of money laundering (26) Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano (27) FIFA: Federal Criminal Court acquits Blatter and Platini (28) War in Ukraine: alleged failure to admit Ukrainian war casualties (29) Credit Suisse: new CEO (30) Glacier melt (31) War in Ukraine: further adoption of EU sanctions (32) Possible energy shortage: Federal Council announces energy savings targets (33) Possible energy shortage: credit line for Axpo (34) Death of Jean-Luc Godard (35) Decision on location of radioactive waste repository near German border (36) Retirement of Roger Federer (37) 25 September 2022 votes (factory farming, OASI reform, withholding tax) (38) SNB raises policy interest rate (39) Glacier melt (40) Credit Suisse reports losses (41) Credit Suisse settles with French public prosecutor's office on alleged tax evasion charges (42) Credit Suisse: presentation of new strategy and investors (43) War in Ukraine: Switzerland refuses to authorise re-export of Swiss ammunition from Germany to Ukraine (44) Debate on the Swiss model as an option for UK-EU relations (45) Switzerland at the FIFA World Cup in Qatar



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

Figure 1

Switzerland's image among populations abroad: Greater awareness of Swiss neutrality

Unlike the foreign media's perception of Switzerland, which is strongly driven by current events and therefore tends to fluctuate, public perception abroad is much less volatile. Switzerland generally enjoys a positive and extremely stable image abroad, as will be illustrated in more detail below. This year, however, a greater awareness of Swiss neutrality was observed among the public abroad. This development can most likely be attributed to the intense media coverage the issue received. These are two key findings of this year's Presence Switzerland Image Monitor, a representative population survey that PRS has carried out every two years since 2016 with the aim of mapping Switzerland's image abroad (see box).

Greater public awareness of neutrality is borne out by the higher share of survey respondents who cited it when asked what they spontaneously associate with Switzerland. However, certain clichés and stereotypes – mountain landscape, chocolate, watches and the financial centre – continue to be the most frequently cited spontaneous associations. The public abroad also associate Switzerland with a robust and stable economy and a high quality of life. Roughly 12% of respondents associated Switzerland with the concept of neutrality (see Figure 2). At the same time, a higher share of 2022 survey respondents cited neutrality as a weakness. This is a remarkable result given that few participants in the 2018 and 2020 surveys mentioned it. When asked which Switzerland-related topics the respondents recalled from media coverage over the last two years, Swiss neutrality, the adoption of sanctions against Russia, the freezing of accounts, claims about possible NATO membership/partnership, and Switzerland's response to the war in Ukraine were cited relatively often.

In most countries, 2022 survey respondents were more critical of Swiss neutrality than in previous years. However, the strength of the criticism varied across countries. Nevertheless, the overall mean score for the statement that Swiss neutrality is something positive was still a good 4.0 points (scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “does not apply at all” and 5 is “applies completely”). At the same time, the population in most of the countries surveyed were less in agreement with the statement than in previous years. This was especially the case in China, Poland and Germany (see Figure 3). Compared to the surveys conducted prior to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, fewer respondents believed that Switzerland's neutrality allows it to mediate in conflicts and provide its good offices internationally. Here, too, the level of agreement has fallen dramatically, especially in China and Poland. Nevertheless, a little under half of respondents associated the city of Geneva with international dialogue and peace and security talks, putting it well ahead of Paris, New York, The Hague and Vienna.

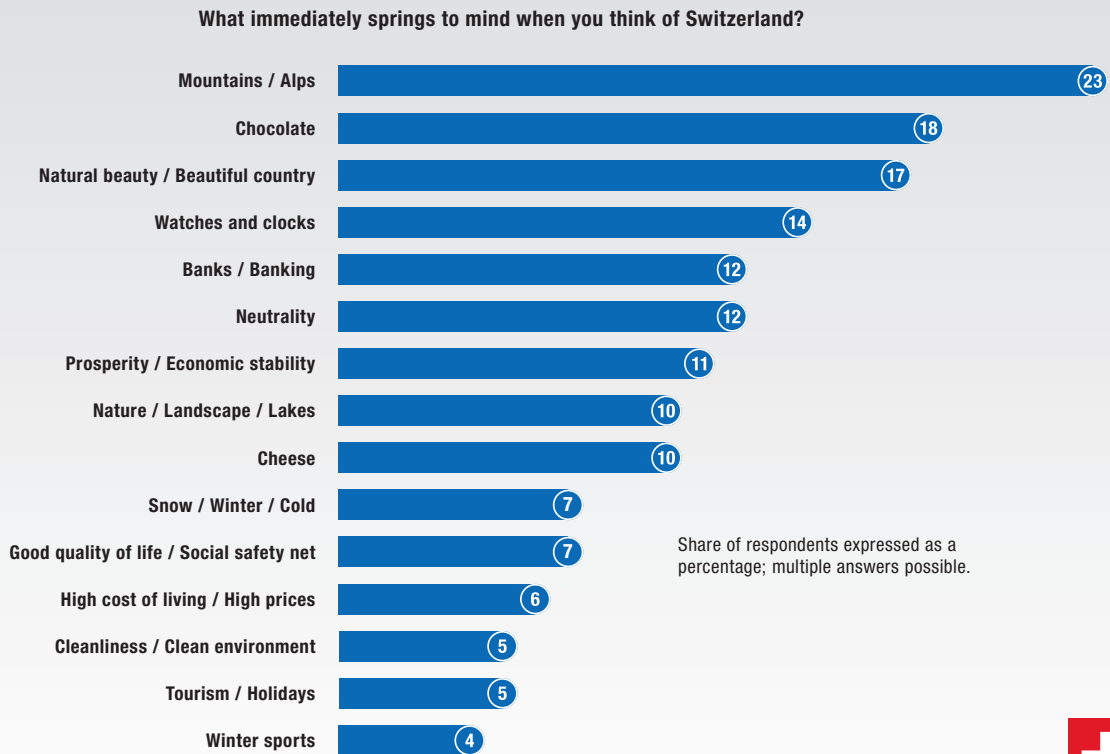
Leaving the issue of neutrality aside, it is interesting to note that the 2022 survey once again confirms that Switzerland generally enjoys an excellent image abroad. Switzerland also fares extremely well by international comparison: on a scale of -100 to +100, Switzerland achieved a very healthy average score of +60 points. When compared alongside seven “benchmark” countries (Denmark, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, the USA and the United Kingdom), Switzerland narrowly beats Canada to the top spot (see Figure 4) In most of the countries surveyed, Switzerland ranks either first, or second after Canada, in terms of overall public perception.

Presence Switzerland Image Monitor

The **Presence Switzerland Image Monitor** maps public perceptions of Switzerland abroad. The results are based on a representative population survey designed by Presence Switzerland. Between 22 May and 23 June 2022, a total of 11 276 people in 18 countries took part in the survey, between 500 and 1000 people in each country. This survey included Argentina, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, UK and the US. No data could be collected in Russia in 2022.

The first Image Monitor survey was conducted in 2016. It was designed as a time series study and is conducted every two years. The findings of the survey are published on the Presence Switzerland [website](#).

Spontaneous associations with Switzerland



Source: Presence Switzerland Image Monitor 2022, n = 11 276



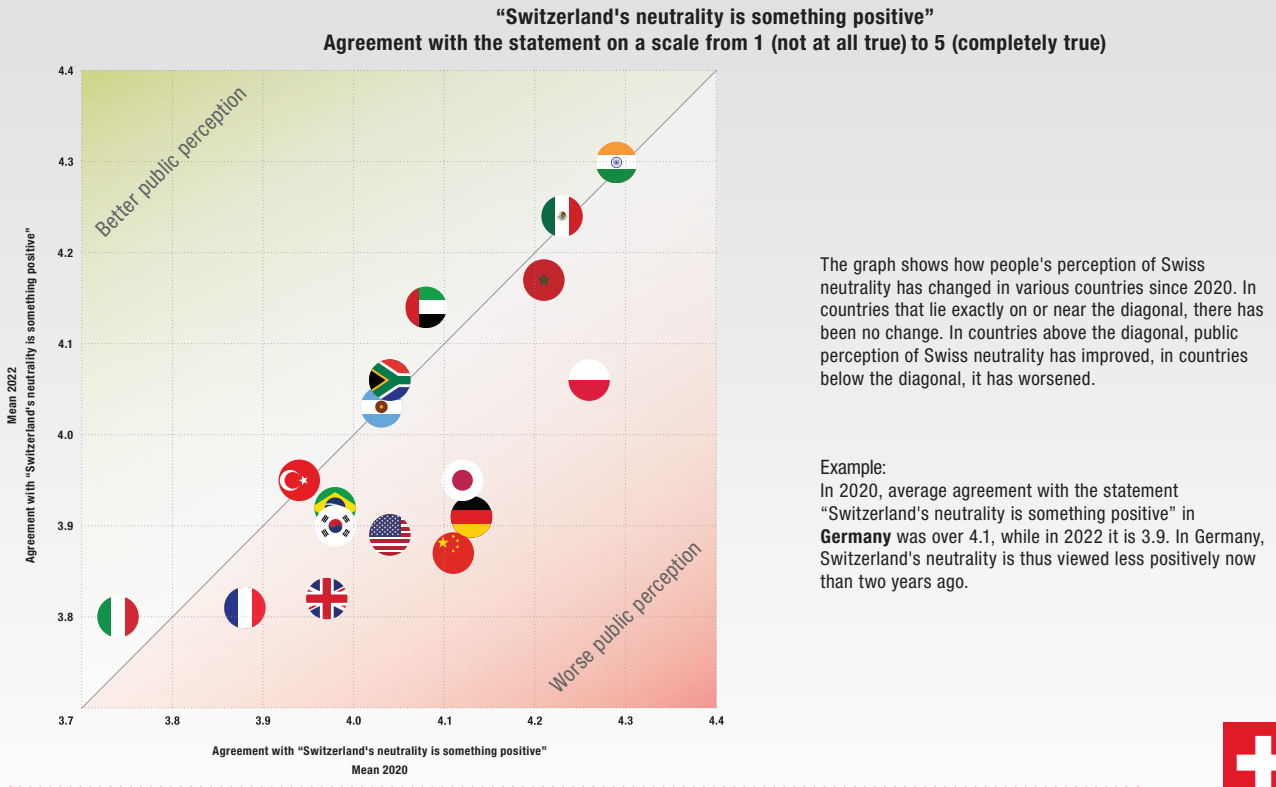
Figure 2

As the answers to the spontaneous association question have already shown, the first impression of Switzerland is positive even though it is heavy on stereotypes. As well as the many strengths and advantages cited by respondents, they nevertheless mention a few weaknesses. Respondents, especially those in neighbouring countries, consider that Switzerland's main disadvantages are the high prices and high cost of living.

The previous surveys also confirm this positive overall assessment of Switzerland. The stability of Switzerland's image abroad is also corroborated by the fact that the vast majority – almost three quarters – of respondents stated that their impression of Switzerland had not changed over the last two years. As many as 10% of survey respondents stated that Switzerland had gone up in their estimation recently, while only 3.5% said the opposite. One of the main factors cited for the improved perception of Switzerland was its healthy and stable economy.

At the same time, the analysis of where and why the public perception of Switzerland has deteriorated is illuminating. A total of 14% of respondents in China stated that Switzerland had gone down in their estimation during 2022. This is extremely high given that the share was a mere 4% in 2020. A similar downward trend was also observed in other countries like India, Germany and the USA. The two most frequently cited reasons for this change were the impression that Switzerland had abandoned its neutral status, as well as the position it has taken with regard to the war in Ukraine. Even if Switzerland's image remains largely stable and positive, the radical changes in the global order of peace and security seem to have played a role in shaping a more negative view of the country. This was particularly true for the public in China and Poland. In both countries, the general public perception of Switzerland has deteriorated dramatically since the last survey in 2020. Clearly, the issue of Swiss neutrality in the context of the war in Ukraine has had a bearing on the public's overall assessment of Switzerland.

Changes in public perception of Swiss neutrality 2020 – 2022



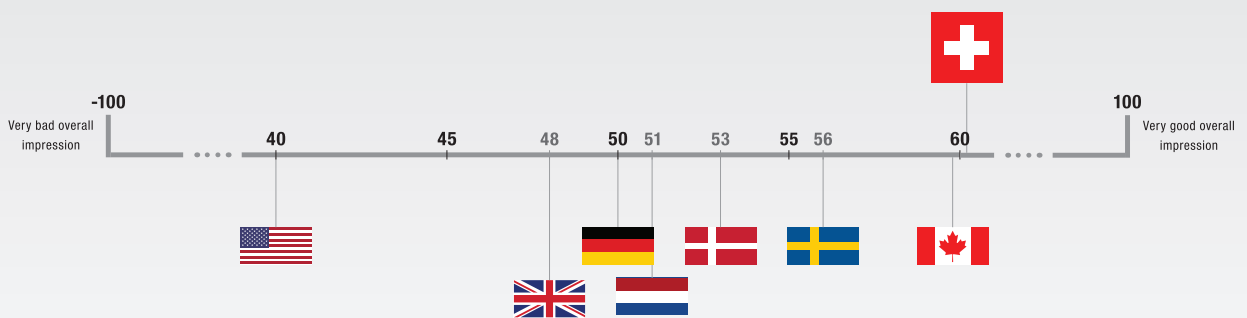
Source: Presence Switzerland Image Monitor 2022, n = 11 276



Figure 3

Overall impression of Switzerland (benchmark comparison)

What is your overall impression of...Switzerland / the United Kingdom / Denmark / Germany / Sweden / Canada / the Netherlands?



Source: Presence Switzerland Image Monitor 2022, n = 11 276 scale from -100 (very bad) to +100 (very good overall impression)

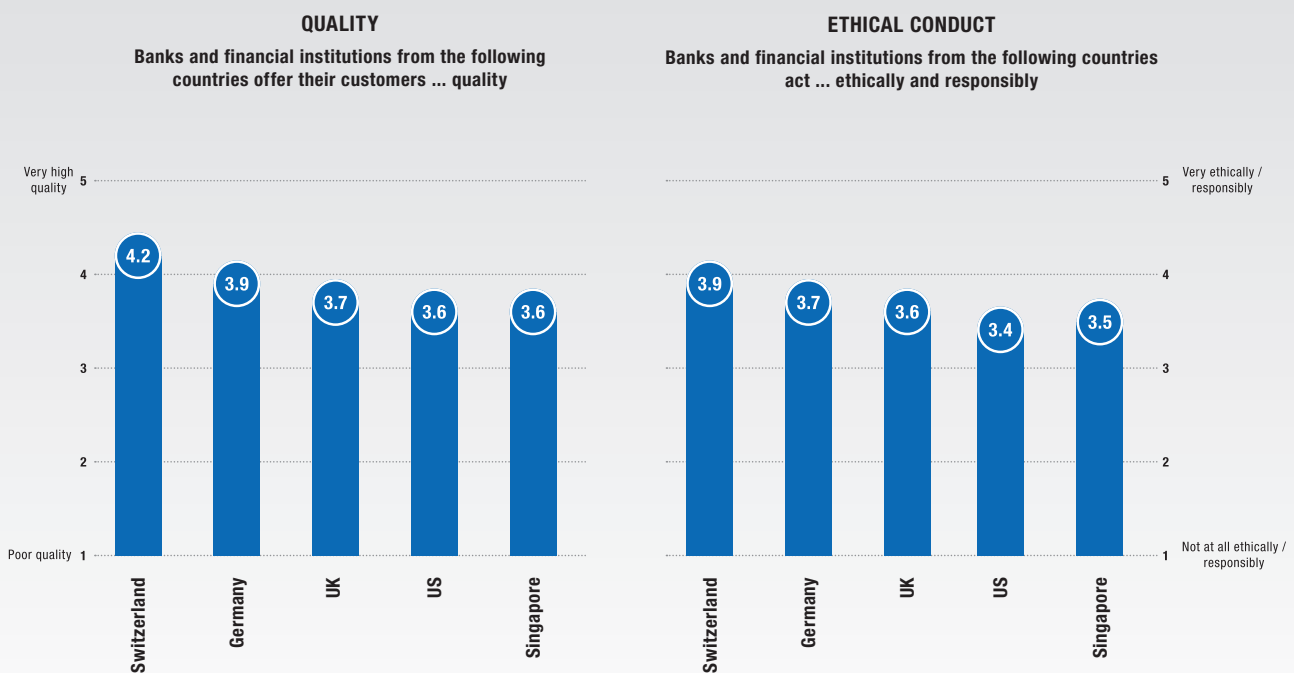


Figure 4

Good reputation of the Swiss financial centre largely intact

Despite various negative headlines involving Credit Suisse and revelations from the “Suisse secrets” data leak, the Swiss financial centre continues to enjoy a good reputation abroad. As in 2020, more than two-thirds of survey respondents rated the quality of Swiss banks and financial institutions as high or very high. This means that all 18 countries surveyed rated the Swiss financial centre significantly higher than the financial centres of Germany, the UK, the US and Singapore (see Figure 5). The Swiss financial centre also fared very well on ethics and integrity. In almost all countries, more than half of respondents stated that Swiss banks and financial institutions act ethically and responsibly. The response from participants in neighbouring countries, as well as the US and the United Kingdom was more critical. When asked about specific weaknesses, also beyond neighbouring countries, respondents continued to cite “banks” and “banking secrecy”, “dirty money”, “tax evasion” and “tax haven”. Apart from that, slightly fewer respondents than in 2020 agreed with the statement that Switzerland had stepped up its efforts to combat tax evasion. Nonetheless, the answer has remained relatively stable over time. Overall, the public perception of the Swiss financial centre abroad has changed very little since the last two surveys.

Perception of Swiss financial centre (benchmark comparison)



Source: Presence Switzerland Image Monitor 2022, n = 11 276



Figure 5

Europe casts a more critical eye

Swiss-EU relations received less media attention this year than in 2021. However, the public abroad is rather critical of Switzerland's role in Europe. This is corroborated by the answers given to questions addressed specifically to respondents living in European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom). Many agreed with the statement that Switzerland only makes a minor contribution to relations with the European Union. This is backed up by responses to various other dimensions of perception. An average of only 30% of European respondents agreed that Switzerland makes a major contribution to EU prosperity. However, it is worth taking a closer look at these responses. In Poland, for example, there is much more agreement with this statement (39% of respondents) than in Switzerland's neighbouring countries (a little over 25%). It is striking that this question polarised opinion in Italy and Austria. A good third of respondents in each of these countries stated that Switzerland does not contribute to EU prosperity, while a similarly high proportion took the opposite view.

A section of the general population abroad continues to be of the opinion that Switzerland is guilty of "cherry-picking". In all six European countries, the majority of respondents agree with the statement that Switzerland gets a lot out of the EU without putting very much in. The average level of agreement with this statement is virtually unchanged since the last survey in 2020, although it has risen slightly in Italy.

A majority of respondents also think that Switzerland should align itself more closely with the EU politically. However, levels of agreement vary considerably across countries: from 30% in the UK to 54% in Italy. On average, more than a third of respondents from these European countries also stated that they were not sure whether Switzerland plays an active role in shaping positive relations with the EU. At 69%, the share was extraordinarily high in Poland. This indicates that the public there is much less well informed about Swiss-EU relations than their peers in Western Europe. A similar observation was made in relation to the response of the Polish public to the question on the importance of scientific and research cooperation between EU countries and Switzerland. Here, too, about two-thirds of all Polish respondents answered "don't know". In all other European countries, more than half of respondents rated scientific and research cooperation with Switzerland as important.

Respondents in neighbouring countries tended to be rather critical of Switzerland's role in Europe. For example, the level of agreement with the statement that Switzerland contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe was much lower in these countries than in Poland and the United Kingdom. Even when we take the pan-European average, Switzerland's contribution to reducing disparities in Europe is still rated rather negatively (see Figure 6). However, the comparison with benchmark countries makes it clear that the level of agreement with the statement in relation to France, Poland, the Netherlands and Germany is also relatively low. With the exception of Norway, which fares well compared to other countries, Switzerland is therefore not necessarily the only country whose role in Europe draws a sceptical response from the public.

Perceived contribution to reducing inequalities in Europe

“Switzerland / France / the Netherlands / Norway / Poland / Germany is helping to reduce economic and social inequalities in Europe”
 Agreement with the statement on a scale from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true)

	Germany	France	Italy	Austria	Poland	UK	Mean score 6 countries
Switzerland contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe	2.8	2.9	2.7	2.8	3.3	3.3	3.0
France contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.1
The Netherlands contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.2
Norway contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.5	3.5	3.3
Poland contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.5	3.0	3.2	2.8
Germany contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.1	2.9	3.3	3.2
	N=1003	1056	1005	501	501	503	4 569

The table shows the average agreement with the statement that a particular country is helping to reduce economic and social inequalities in Europe.

Example:
 Agreement with the statement “Switzerland contributes to reducing economic and social inequalities in Europe” is the lowest in Italy, with a mean score of 2.7 (on a scale of 1–5), and the highest in Poland and the UK, with a mean score of 3.3. Agreement with the statement across all six countries surveyed is on average 3.0.

Source: Presence Switzerland Image Monitor 2022, n = 11 276



Figure 6

Conclusion: Switzerland's overall public image abroad remained positive in 2022, but its political positioning came under scrutiny in the foreign media

For the second year running, political issues heavily impacted Switzerland's image abroad. The Swiss response with regard to the war in Ukraine garnered a particularly high level of interest. For Switzerland, and other countries as well, it was a matter that had a major influence on how they were perceived abroad, especially by the foreign media. In the case of Switzerland, there are two reasons for the high volume of foreign media coverage in 2022. The first was the global relevance of the war in general. The second was related Switzerland-specific issues like neutrality. The analysis of foreign media coverage and the findings of the population survey carried out in multiple countries clearly show that these aspects played an important and decisive role in Switzerland's image abroad. Reports in the foreign media, especially in Europe, often criticised Switzerland's neutral status and its policy of neutrality. Some argued that they were primarily a tool for the country to further its economic self-interest. Switzerland's stance and actions with regard to the war in Ukraine also had an effect on its perception among the public abroad. Although more 2022 survey respondents associated neutrality with Switzerland than in previous surveys, they also rated it more negatively. One factor behind this shift is the critical coverage from certain sections of the foreign media. Also potential benefits of Swiss neutrality, such as the performance of good offices and conflict mediation, were less prominent in the perception abroad than in previous years. In short, neutrality is recognised as an intrinsic part of Switzerland's identity but it is a subject that polarises public opinion. Switzerland's implementation of its policy of neutrality receives close scrutiny and influences how other countries perceive it. Of course, perceptions varied both between and within countries.

Leaving the neutrality issue aside, Switzerland continued to enjoy a very positive and stable image among the public abroad in 2022. Generally, the image is rather one-dimensional and based on stereotypes, such as beautiful mountain landscapes, watches, chocolate and the Swiss financial centre.

In 2022, the financial centre also generated a significant portion of the Switzerland-related coverage in the foreign media. The publication of client data as part of the "Suisse secrets" data leak and various stories involving the major bank Credit Suisse attracted particular attention. However, it appears that these events did not have a noticeably adverse effect on the public perception of the Swiss financial centre abroad. At times, reports in the Western media explored both these events in the context of Swiss neutrality. This was the case in coverage of the assets held by Russian oligarchs in Switzerland.

In contrast, Swiss-EU relations did not feature very much in foreign media coverage in 2022. The issue was the subject of isolated, critical reporting, primarily in neighbouring countries. The European public largely shared these criticisms. There, too, the majority of 2022 survey respondents felt that Switzerland got a lot from the EU without putting much in. This issue has thus a potentially adverse effect on Switzerland's image abroad at the present time, but received much less attention abroad in 2022 than in the previous year.

Switzerland's political position in Europe and in the wider world was already attracting considerable foreign media coverage last year. The war in Ukraine has strengthened the influence that political matters exert on Switzerland's image abroad still further. In a time of greater international polarisation and conflict, there is added interest in the question of whether other countries perceive Switzerland as an actor with a sense of solidarity, which in turns makes the issue increasingly relevant for Switzerland's image abroad.

Pictures

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Swiss President Ignazio Cassis, left, welcomes Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal to the Ukraine Recovery Conference URC, on Monday, July 4, 2022 in Lugano – ©KEYSTONE/EDA/Michael Buholzer

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As a unit within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, FDFA, Presence Switzerland supports the safeguarding of Switzerland's interests abroad by analysing the way in which Switzerland is perceived internationally, and by applying a range of international public relations tools. These include means of information and communication, projects abroad, welcoming delegations to Switzerland, as well as Switzerland's presence at world expos, and the *House of Switzerland* at major international events. The Federal Council regularly reviews Switzerland's international communication strategy.

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