

Switzerland in the foreign media: 4th quarter of 2023

Mixed reactions to Switzerland's actions regarding the war in Ukraine

Switzerland's stance and actions in the context of the war in Ukraine continued to attract interest in the foreign media in the fourth quarter. However, the volume of media coverage decreased to a much lower level than at the beginning of the year.

"Swiss Neutrality Debated in a World of Geopolitical Divisions"

(*Bloomberg*, United States)

At the end of November, the international media reported largely factually on the sale of 25 Leopard 2 tanks back to Germany, which had been approved by the Federal Council but was conditional on the tanks not being re-exported to Ukraine. In Germany itself, however, the Swiss War Materiel Act, which is perceived as restrictive, and Switzerland's interpretation of neutrality continued to be met with scepticism. President Alain Berset's visit to Kyiv was received favourably, particularly in the Eastern European media. During the fourth quarter, the media in Russia were decidedly critical of Swiss–Russian relations. Statements from the Russian foreign ministry were often quoted in this regard, according to which there was practically no longer any dialogue between the two countries. The media also highlighted that Switzerland was no longer neutral and had clearly damaged its financial centre by adopting the EU sanctions.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomes Swiss President Alain Berset during his visit to Kyiv in November. (© *Kyiv Independent*)



Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova speaks of damaged relations between Switzerland and Russia. (© *R7*)

Federal parliamentary and Federal Council elections

The results of the federal elections were widely reported in the international media. The focus was on the electoral success of the SVP and the losses of the Green parties, which, according to the media, reflected a broader European trend.

"L'avanzata della destra...non imprimerà cambiamenti alla politica adottata da Berna che negli ultimi anni aveva subito significative rotture con il passato."

(*Corriere della Sera*, Italy)

Migration was the core issue of these elections and of the SVP, with no room for topics such as climate change or the demise of Credit Suisse, according to media articles. The data breach at the Federal Statistical Office garnered significant attention, especially in German-speaking countries, and was sometimes commented on with amusement, drawing on common clichés about Swiss accuracy. The re-election of the entire Federal Council was also predominantly covered by German media, which also shed light on the peculiarities of the Swiss political system in this context.



A woman casts her vote in the federal parliamentary elections at a school in Delémont on 22 October. (© *El País*)

Switzerland–EU: prospect of resumption of negotiations

At the beginning of the fourth quarter, relations between Switzerland and the EU were only periodically mentioned in the foreign media. The state visit of Emmanuel Macron in November, who made Europe and Switzerland's relations with the EU the focus of his visit, increased media attention.

"Die Verhandlungen über die zukünftigen Beziehungen der Schweiz zur EU gehen jetzt in die entscheidende Phase"

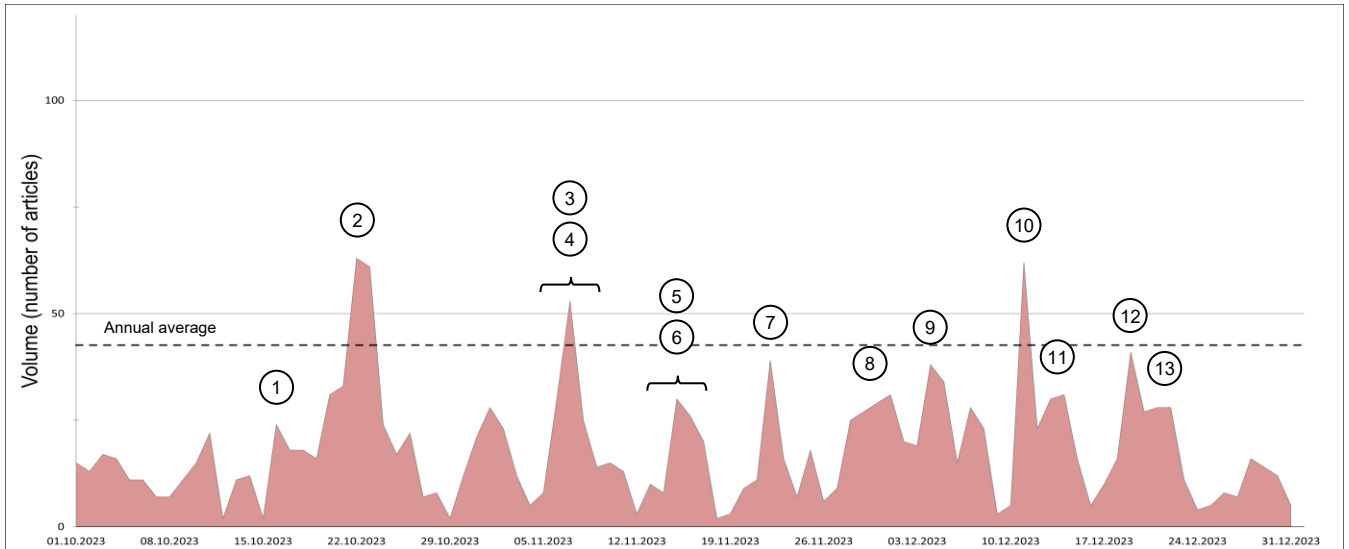
(*Krone*, Austria)

The drafting of a negotiating mandate for talks with the EU, announced by the Federal Council, and the actual adoption of the draft in December were initially covered in the foreign media in a concise and factual manner. Later, some foreign media outlets reported on the intended resumption of negotiations in more detailed individual commentaries of varying tone.



Switzerland broke off the last negotiations with the EU in 2021. Now the Swiss government and the European Commission want to try again. (© *Bloomberg*)

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, 01.10.2023 – 31.12.2023). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of their volume and significance.

(1) Reporting in the run-up to the federal elections (2) Federal elections (3) UBS quarterly figures (4) Swiss research success in treating Parkinson's disease (5) State visit by Emmanuel Macron (6) French Court of Cassation ruling against UBS for aiding and abetting money laundering of tax fraud proceeds (7) Approval of the sale of 25 Leopard 2 tanks back to Germany (8) Contacts between Catalan separatists and Swiss authorities and institutions (9) Settlement between Pictet and US Department of Justice for aiding and abetting tax evasion (10) Violent crime in Sion (11) Re-election of the Federal Council (12) FINMA presents first detailed report after CS collapse (13) Agreement between the UK and Switzerland on mutual recognition in financial services

Focus: Swiss sustainability efforts as perceived abroad

Switzerland is committed at both national and international level to implementing the 2030 Agenda adopted by the UN General Assembly. Based on the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy, Swiss sustainability policy aims to give equal weight to the three dimensions of environmental responsibility, social solidarity and economic performance, and to take account of the limits of the global ecosystem. Sustainability is also becoming increasingly important for a country's image. The Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) measures annually the reputation of 60 nations in various areas. Five questions on various aspects of sustainability were added for the first time in 2023. These included an assessment of a country's commitment to combating climate change and its efforts in pursuit of affordable and clean energy. Switzerland ranks among the top six in the NBI for all of these questions. When it comes to the question of whether the country promotes responsible and environmentally friendly industries, Switzerland is in joint first place with Sweden in the perception of the general public abroad. These NBI results show that Switzerland is perceived very favourably abroad in the area of sustainability, which also has a potential impact on its overall image.

	Rankings (6 top-ranking nations)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
taking action to combat climate change	SE	No.	EN	CA	CH	FI
working hard towards affordable and clean energy	SE	EN	No.	CA / CH	FI	
focused on protecting wildlife and restoring habitats	AU	CA / NZ		No.	SE	CH
focused on access to clean water and nutrition for all	SE	CA / CH		No.	EN	AU
encourages more responsible industries that do not damage the environment	SE / CH		No.	CA	FI	EN

NBI ranking of the best-rated countries (rank 1-6) with regard to various aspects of sustainability

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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. Contact: FDFA, Presence Switzerland, Monitoring and Analysis Section, Bundesgasse 32, 3003 Bern, tel. +41 58 462 34 63, prs@eda.admin.ch, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/praesenzschweiz>