

Switzerland in the foreign media 1st. quarter 2018

Major interest in Donald Trump's visit to the WEF

As in previous years, the World Economic Forum (WEF) drew intense interest in the international media, owing in particular the presence of Donald Trump. Like every year, the foreign press also reported on other leaders attending the WEF and the issues being addressed. With regard to Switzerland, there was particular coverage of the anti-Trump demonstrations and protests in various cities. While the reports themselves were mostly objective and factual, the accompanying images portrayed the protest banners, depicting at times harsh messages directed at the US president. One image of the protests even featured on the front page of the international print copy of the New York Times. The articles are often shared in social media. The reporting on the WEF conveyed the image of Switzerland as an important venue for international exchanges of opinion in business and politics. At the same time, however, the anti-Trump actions of a section of society were also given high visibility.

“Trump says he'll attend Davos. Some Swiss campaigners say ‘no thanks’”
(Washington Post, USA)

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‘No Billag initiative’ draws world-wide media attention

Already weeks before the popular vote, the ‘No Billag initiative’ attracted attention in foreign media. Numerous background articles described the Swiss media system and explained the specifics of the initiative. The subsequent rejection of the initiative on 4 March was reported around the world with commentary being mostly neutral to positive. Especially in Germany and Austria, where similar debates on the future of public broadcasting are taking place, the outcome of the vote received a great deal of attention in the press. The media in these countries saw the decision of the Swiss electorate as an important signal for independent quality journalism and societal cohesion. In addition to the political debate in the media, some media outlets took the opportunity to discuss the Swiss political system – and qualified it as a system that works well.

“Die Schweiz erscheint manchmal wie ein politisches Versuchslabor”
(FAZ, Germany)

Reports about Catalan separatists in Switzerland

In the context of the Catalan crisis, several events with connections to Switzerland drew the attention of the Spanish and other foreign media. Firstly, the presence in Switzerland of the separatist Anna Gabriel, who is seeking protection, was the object of some negative reporting in the Spanish press. The position of the Federal Office of Justice also received mention: as a rule, Switzerland does not grant extradition requests for political offences. The media were less critical about the report of the visit of the former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont to Geneva and the stay of another Catalan separatist, Marta Rovira, in Switzerland. The debate about a possible extradition procedure was treated by the media as an opportunity to analyse Swiss penal law. Outside Spain, some media outlets also described the way Switzerland and other European countries deal with potential extradition and legal assistance requests.

“La anticapitalista Anna Gabriel huye de la justicia y se instala en el símbolo mundial del capitalismo, Suiza”
(20 minutos, Spain)

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President of the Swiss Confederation Alain Berset and US President Donald Trump at the WEF in Davos (© Daily Mail)



Demonstration in Bern against Donald Trump's visit to the WEF (© L'Express)

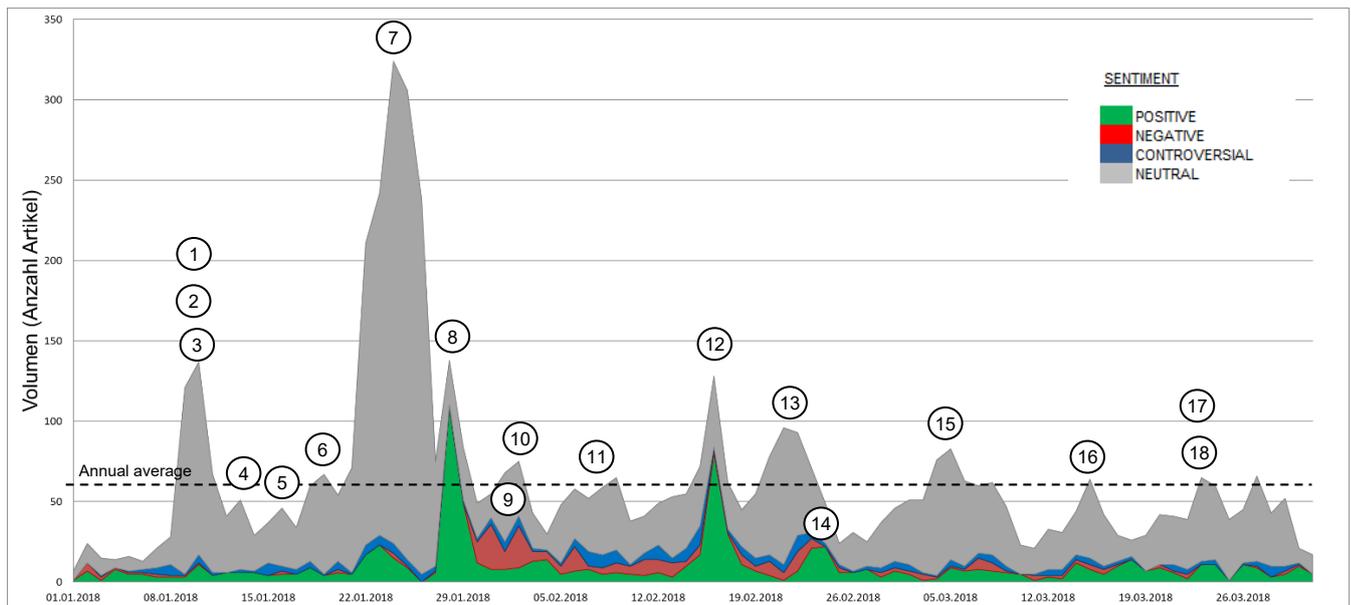


The No campaign for the vote on the 'No Billag initiative' (© taz)



Catalan separatist Anna Gabriel in Switzerland (© El País)

Quantitative development of foreign media reporting on Switzerland



Development of the volume and tone of foreign media reporting on Swiss-related topics (Volume = number of articles per day in the leading media outlets analysed, 1.1.2018 – 31.3.2018). A peak in the chart can refer to several events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of their circulation volume and importance.

(1) Announcement of Donald Trump's participation at the WEF in Davos. (2) Zermatt snowed in. (3) Federal Council ordinance on the preparation and transport of lobsters, crayfish and crabs. (4) Demonstrations against Donald Trump's visit to the WEF. (5) Geneva Watch Fair. (6) Rejection by the European Court of Human Rights of a complaint by two Basel families about sex education in primary schools. (7) WEF Davos and Donald Trump's visit. (8) Roger Federer wins the Australian Open. (9) Arrest of Swiss Islam scholar Tariq Ramadan in Paris. (10) Lifting of the doping ban on Russian athletes at the Winter Olympics by the Court of Arbitration for Sport. (11) Talks between Swiss Re and the Japanese company Softbank. (12) Roger Federer no. 1 in the ATP ranking. (13) Catalan separatist Anna Gabriel's stay in Geneva. (14) Victories of Swiss athletes at the Olympic Games. (15) Vote on the 'No Billag initiative'. (16) Carles Puigdemont's visit to Geneva. (17) Catalan separatist Marta Rovira's stay in Switzerland. (18) Death of Swiss singer Lys Assia.

A closer look: "Crypto Nation Switzerland": Opportunities and risks for the image

The topic of Switzerland as a location for crypto currencies and blockchain technology is repeatedly appearing in the foreign press, especially since Federal Councillor Schneider-Ammann declared Switzerland as a "crypto nation" at the world's first *Crypto Conference* in St. Moritz, Switzerland, last January. Detailed articles are reporting on the joint efforts of the Federal Council and a task force made up of representatives from politics, business and academia to make Switzerland a global centre for blockchain technology. The reports analyse both the potential and the challenges for Switzerland as a location for crypto currencies: Some media outlets highlight the opportunities presented by crypto currencies, e.g. promoting technologies, and thereby conveying the image of an innovative Switzerland taking a leading role in the use of new currency models with digital technologies. Even the first proposals to regulate initial coin offerings (ICO) by the financial market supervisory authority Finma were positively received. Other media outlets are placing more emphasis on the reputation risks of crypto currencies, stressing the dangers of money laundering and tax evasion. In this context "Crypto Valley" Zug does not bask in an entirely positive light. For instance, the blockchain start-up *Tezos* made the headlines when it was accused by US bitcoin investors of fraudulent marketing and mismanagement. Although reports remain objective, at times critics have been quoted as describing the city of Zug as a "notorious haven for white-collar crime". Such commentaries harbour the risk of current negative images of the Swiss financial centre affecting the "Crypto Nation Switzerland" image.

Monitoring of Switzerland's image in the foreign media includes all the reporting on Swiss-related topics in the leading media in 18 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, the UK and the US) as well as in the leading pan-Arabic and EU media.

Contact: FDFA, Presence Switzerland, Monitoring and Analysis Section, Bundesgasse 32, 3003 Bern
Tel. +41 31 322 01 83, email: prs@eda.admin.ch, www.eda.admin.ch/praesenzschweiz