



# Switzerland in the foreign media: 3rd quarter 2021

## Sport in the spotlight – and Switzerland right in the middle

Various major sporting events that Switzerland participated in attracted attention worldwide. In this context, the strong performance of Swiss athletes was also widely noted. The most significant attention-grabber was the European Football Championship, in which Switzerland made it to the quarter finals. The underdog victory over France in particular attracted attention worldwide. The team's fighting spirit was praised and the emotional celebrations in the streets is noted with surprise, considered unusual for Switzerland.

**"Dank ihres Kampfgeists werden die Spieler der „Nati“ gefeiert, als hätten sie gewonnen"**

*FAZ, Germany*

A meme that went viral and socio-political issues surrounding the national team were also discussed. At the Olympic Games, the 'Swiss sweep' in mountain biking in particular, with special mention of Jolanda Neff's gold medal, as well as the performances of tennis players Belinda Bencic and Viktorija Golubic attracted a lot of attention. Bern Young Boys' unexpected victory over Manchester United in the first match of the UEFA Champions League group round received a lot of attention in international media as well as on social media. This unusually big coverage helped to raise the profile of qualities that are otherwise rarely associated with Switzerland – such as athletic performance in various disciplines and public display of emotions. This added some nuances to the classic pattern of how people perceive Switzerland.



Images of a Swiss national football team fan go viral as a meme (© *Corriere della sera*)



Swiss sweep: three Swiss athletes on the Olympic podium (© *Wall Street Journal*)

## Marriage equality: result of referendum perceived positively

The defeat of the referendum that aimed to block marriage equality legislation attracted a lot of media attention around the world. The tone of the reporting ranged from factual to positive, with several media outlets explicitly welcoming the result of the referendum. Many of the reports pointed out that same-sex marriages have already been legal in most Western European countries for some time.

**"Toleranz und Freiheit sind in der Mitte der Gesellschaft angekommen"**

*(TAZ, Germany)*

However, according to their analyses, Switzerland's late progress compared to other countries of the same region was primarily due to its political system. Almost all reports pointed out that the result was very clear. The reporting furthered the perception that the Swiss population is more liberal than is sometimes assumed abroad.

**"È vero che la Svizzera è arrivata tardi a questo passo, ma è anche vero...che si è trattato di una scelta di popolo"**

*(La Repubblica, Italy)*



The referendum on marriage equality was depicted internationally in particular via its proponents' activities (© *Al Jazeera*)

## Procurement of fighter jets: French media ruffled

The Federal Council's decision to procure 36 US F-35A fighter jets and thereby de facto dismissing European options was widely reported on by foreign media. The decision attracted the most attention in neighbouring countries, where reporting in the French media in particular expressed surprise and at times criticism. In the context of relations between Switzerland and the EU, many of their reports interpreted the decision as a missed opportunity and an additional snub targeting Brussels following the breakdown of negotiations on an institutional agreement between Switzerland and the EU.

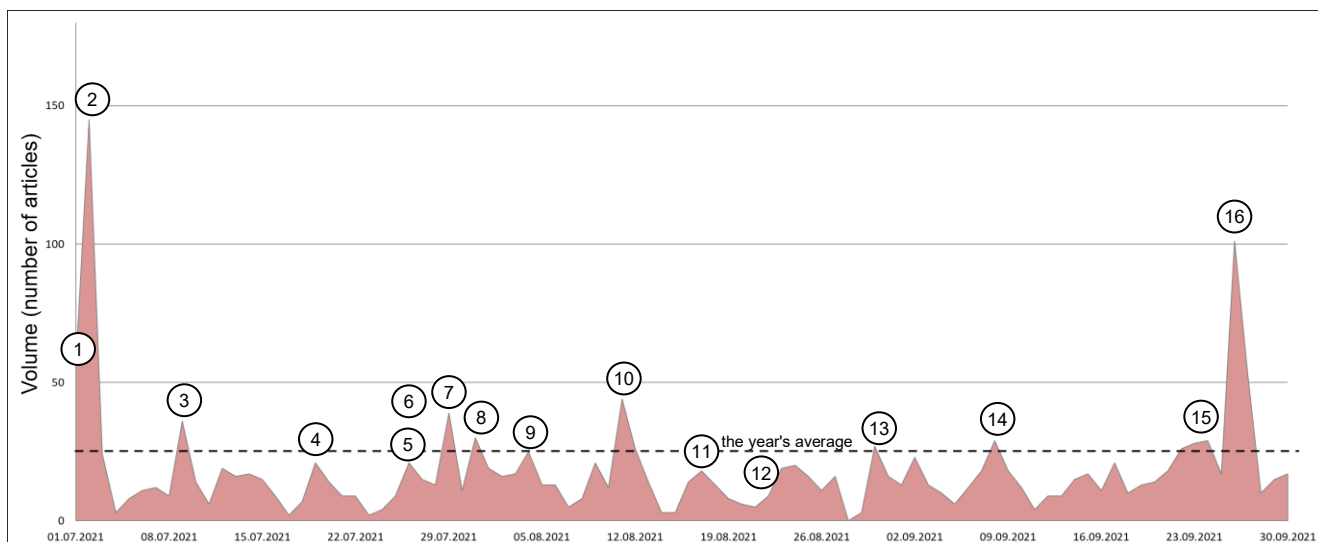
**"Le choix d'un avion de combat européen aurait été un moyen de retisser les liens avec l'Union européenne"**

*(Le Figaro, France)*



Swiss fighter jets flying over the Alps (© *Les Echos*)

## Quantitative trends in foreign media coverage of Switzerland – volume (number of articles)



Changes in the volume and tone of foreign media coverage of Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.07.2021 – 30.09.2021). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of the extent of their volume and their significance.

- (1) Federal Council decision on the F-35A fighter jets
- (2) Switzerland–Spain quarter-final match, Euro 2020
- (3) Various reports on the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland
- (4) Various reports on the Swiss financial centre
- (5) Russian-Swiss Magnitsky money laundering case closed by the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland after ten years
- (6) 'Swiss sweep' at the Olympics (mountain biking)
- (7) Report of the investigation of the Archegos case: serious allegations against Credit Suisse's risk control
- (8) Olympic victory of Belinda Bencic (tennis)
- (9) Opening of Locarno Film Festival
- (10) Twitter diplomacy 1: Chinese media reports of a fictitious Swiss scientist, corrective tweet by the Swiss embassy in China and consequences
- (11) Swiss world record in calculating pi
- (12) Swiss projects to promote renewable energy
- (13) Twitter diplomacy 2: Debate on Argentina-Switzerland comparison
- (14) Criticism of business relationships of two Swiss companies with China
- (15) Reports in the run-up to the vote on marriage equality
- (16) Referendum result: Marriage equality legislation accepted by Swiss population

### Focus: Twitter diplomacy

Twitter diplomacy refers to the use of social media by heads of state, international organisations, and diplomats for purposes primarily related to foreign policy. It is public communication visible to the global public. In some cases, such tweets are also picked up by traditional media, which massively increases their reach. In the third quarter of 2021, two tweets of Swiss representations attracted a great deal of attention around the world: The reaction of the Swiss embassy in China to reports in the Chinese media about statements by a fictitious Swiss scientist on the origin of COVID-19 went viral. In its statement, the embassy expressed doubts that the scientist actually existed and warned against the spread of fake news. Media around the world picked up the statement. On social media, the original statement was spread very widely on both Twitter and Weibo (a Chinese social network). A few weeks later, the Swiss representation in Argentina reacted on Twitter to the Argentinian security minister's statement that Switzerland was safer than Argentina, but also more boring. In his tweet, the Swiss ambassador added a link to an ironically self-deprecating promotional video by Switzerland Tourism in which Robert De Niro complains about Switzerland's lack of drama. The tweet was spread very widely, and numerous Argentinian media outlets praised it as a successful response to an inappropriate comparison. The examples show that official communication via social media can make a very high broad impact quickly, making one's own narrative accessible to a wide audience. But this requires suitable conditions. For example, reach is boosted if, as in the two examples, the communication builds on topics that are being publicly discussed locally or globally at the given time and contributes a new point of view to the existing debate.

Monitoring the image of Switzerland in the foreign media covers all the reporting on Swiss-related topics in the leading media of 19 countries, including 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.

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