

Switzerland in the foreign media: 1st quarter 2022

Conflicting views of Switzerland's response to the war in Ukraine

Switzerland's reaction to Russia's military attack on Ukraine drew a great deal of attention in foreign media. There are three distinct phases here. First, right after the war broke out, the Swiss decision to adopt EU sanctions against Russia only through measures aimed at preventing their circumvention met with incomprehension. Especially on social media, the comments on the decision were very critical and sparked heated debate. Second, the subsequent decision to adopt EU sanctions in full met with a positive echo worldwide. Many media outlets – and US President Joe Biden in his State of the Union address – pointed out that "even Switzerland"

«Switzerland says it will freeze Russian assets, setting aside a tradition of neutrality»
(*New York Times*, US)

land" 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 is noteworthy. Some of the reporting here gave the impression that Switzerland had abandoned its neutrality. Other, nuanced coverage examined the issue of the compatibility of Swiss neutrality with sanctions. Switzerland's position attracted attention in foreign media through guest contributions from President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis. Third, from mid-March, some media outlets renewed their criticism of Switzerland's sanctions implementation, finding it hesitant. Here, Ukrainian President Zelenskiy's demands of the Swiss financial centre attracted special attention. Coverage of other topics in this context included Switzerland's significance regarding Russian oligarchs and the trading of Russian commodities, which the EU has not yet subjected to sanctions. During all three phases, Russian media covered Switzerland only sporadically, focusing on divergences from the EU's action, which were seen as positive. Overall, the perception of Switzerland's response to the war in Ukraine was ambivalent.

«Die langsame, bürokratische Umsetzung der Sanktionen lässt an der Kri-
sentauglichkeit des Schweizer Regie-
rungssystems zweifeln.»
(*FAZ*, Germany)

'Suisse Secrets': criticism of Credit Suisse and the Swiss financial centre

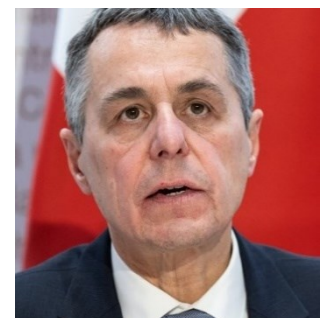
The Swiss bank Credit Suisse has in the past helped numerous corrupt politicians, officials and criminals to launder money and avoid taxes. Many media outlets worldwide reported on this over several days. Their reporting was based on their coordinated analyses of data on Credit Suisse clients. This data had been made available to the media anonymously. The reports focused on Credit Suisse as well as on prominent figures from all over the world whose possibly corrupt and illicit financial activities were brought to light using the data concerning their accounts.

«Die „Zebra-Strategie“ der Schweiz:
Weissgeld aus reichen, Schwarzgeld aus
armen Staaten.»
(*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Germany)

In particular, the media involved in the investigations also expressed criticism of Switzerland and its financial centre in various areas, including the fact that to this day, Switzerland does not maintain an automatic exchange of information with many countries particularly prone to corruption.



Ukrainian President Zelenskiy joined a rally in Bern virtually (© *Standard*)



President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis was frequently quoted by the media (© *FAZ*)

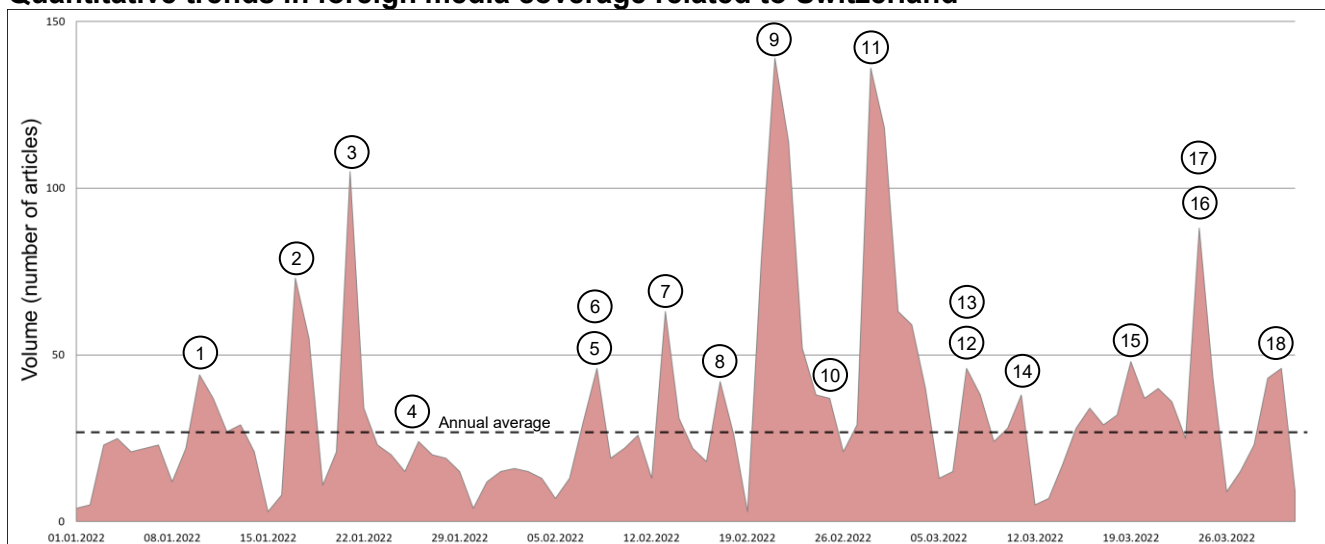


The free ports in Geneva were also attracting attention as possible hiding places for Russian oligarchs' assets (© *Bloomberg*)



Reports published by the media outlets involved in the 'Suisse Secrets' investigations were presented in a standardised format (© *La Stampa*)

Quantitative trends in foreign media coverage related to Switzerland



Changes in the volume of foreign media coverage related to Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.01.2022 – 31.03.2022). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of their volume and significance.

(1) Meeting of US/Russian deputy foreign ministers in Geneva (2) Resignation of Credit Suisse's board of directors' chairman (3) Talks between foreign ministers Blinken-Lavrov in Geneva (4) Relaxing of COVID-19 measures (5) Horizon Europe and 'Stick to Science' campaign (6) Swiss paraplegia-related research success (7) 13 February 2022 votes (ban on animal experimentation, tobacco advertising, stamp duty, basic rights of non-human primates in canton Basel City) (8) Lifting of most of the COVID-19 measures (9) 'Suisse Secrets' (10) War in Ukraine: Swiss decision to adopt EU sanctions against Russia solely through measures aimed at preventing their circumvention (11) War in Ukraine: full adoption of EU sanctions; Swiss neutrality (12) the CHF's rise above parity versus the EUR (13) Legal proceedings – appeal before the Federal Criminal Court – in the case of football officials Al-Khelaifi and Valcke (14) War in Ukraine: criticism of Swiss hosting of commodities trading; adoption of further EU sanctions (15) War in Ukraine: Ukrainian President Zelenskiy criticises Swiss financial centre and Nestlé (16) War in Ukraine: Russian assets worth CHF 6 billion frozen (17) 'Family tragedy' in Montreux (18) War in Ukraine: criticism of sanctions implementation

Focus: Switzerland as a commodities hub

Despite its steadily growing international significance, foreign media interest in Switzerland as a commodity trading centre has been rather limited in recent years. The focus has been on the economic development of individual companies and sometimes on accusations directly directed against them in connection with alleged corruption, alleged human rights violations, and alleged environmental pollution. In the contexts of gold trading and the corporate responsibility initiative, the regulatory framework of commodity trading in Switzerland has also been

«Putins Rohstoff-Dorado in den Alpen»
(Die Presse, Austria)

«Switzerland joined in sanctions, but Russia's oil, metals and grains still trade there»
(New York Times, US)

analysed and criticised in regard to specific cases. In connection with the war in Ukraine, foreign media are now increasingly focusing their attention on commodities trading, and in particular on trade in Russian commodities in Switzerland. Up to 80% of Russian commodities are traded in Switzerland, the media maintains.

This helps to fill the Russian war chest and could turn Switzerland into a profiteer of the world's dependence on Russian fuels. Yet the other way around, Switzerland's prominence as a commodities hub could instead help it play a key role in efforts to sanction Russia. Some foreign media criticise what they see as insufficient regulation and oversight of the commodities sector in Switzerland, whereas others report that faced with the threat of reputational damage, Swiss commodity traders, banks and investors have already voluntarily imposed severe restrictions on trade in Russian commodities. Should sanctions be imposed in this area, an increase in media interest in the Swiss commodities sector and its regulation can be expected.

«Schweizer Rohstoffhandel füllt Putins Kriegskasse»
(Deutsche Welle, Germany)

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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