

Switzerland in the foreign media: 2nd quarter 2021

Geneva summit: showcasing Switzerland

The announcement at the end of May of a summit meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva was widely reported in the foreign media. Most articles took a positive stance on Switzerland's role as host state. They considered Geneva to be a good choice because of Switzerland's tradition of discretion and neutrality, and also because it is not a NATO member, therefore making it acceptable to the Russian side. The media were also interested in

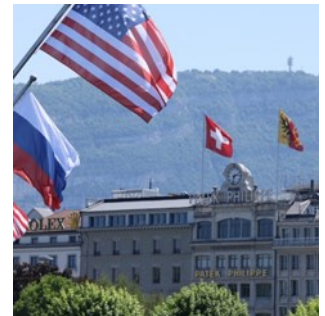
“The two leaders were greeted by President Guy Parmelin of Switzerland, who welcomed them to Geneva, ‘the city of peace’”
(The New York Times, USA)

the large-scale logistical and organisational aspects of the event. The summit itself, which was described as historic, drew an almost unprecedented flood of international media coverage. Although most reports focused primarily on the protagonists, topics and outcomes of the summit, Switzerland and Geneva also received the highest amount of media coverage in recent years. Many media outlets reported extensively on International Geneva as well as Switzerland's good offices, neutrality and traditional role as a host state. TV reporting on the event included both the tourism appeal of Geneva and Switzerland in addition to highlighting their organisational capabilities related to the summit. President of the Swiss Confederation Guy Parmelin's welcome of the two presidents also received considerable attention in the media, often repeating his description of Geneva as a “city of peace” in their reporting.

Switzerland–EU: breakdown of institutional agreement negotiations

International media coverage of Swiss-EU relations this quarter was dominated by the breakdown of negotiations on an institutional agreement, a topic which had only been reported on sporadically in the run-up to recent events. Coverage was largely balanced, focusing on the state of the negotiations, each side's position and the potential fallout of a failure to reach an agreement. As of May, European media began to increasingly portray the negotiations as deadlocked and the tone, especially in Germany, became more and more critical towards Switzerland, remarking that Switzerland was reluctant to sign the agreement whereas the EU had expected a greater willingness to compromise. Switzerland's decision on 26 May to break off negotiations generated a great deal of media interest in Europe, particularly in neighbouring countries. Most reports were factual in nature, although Switzerland was clearly held responsible for the failure to. The German-language media was generally very critical, pointing out that Switzerland's renouncing of the agreement amounted to self-harm and increasing self-isolation. There was some sympathy for Switzerland among the Eurosceptic press in the United Kingdom. Many European media outlets reporting on events at a later date published more in-depth articles analysing the failure of the agreement in factual and critical terms. Most concluded that the reason the agreement failed was that Switzerland wanted to benefit from access to the internal market without accepting any of the conditions.

“Das, was sich die meisten Schweizer Akteure wünschen, nämlich einfach weitermachen wie bisher, steht in Brüssel mit Sicherheit nicht zur Debatte”
(Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany)



Coverage of the summit included a number of images of the city of Geneva and its landmarks.
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Russian President Vladimir Putin at his press conference in Geneva.
(© *El País*)

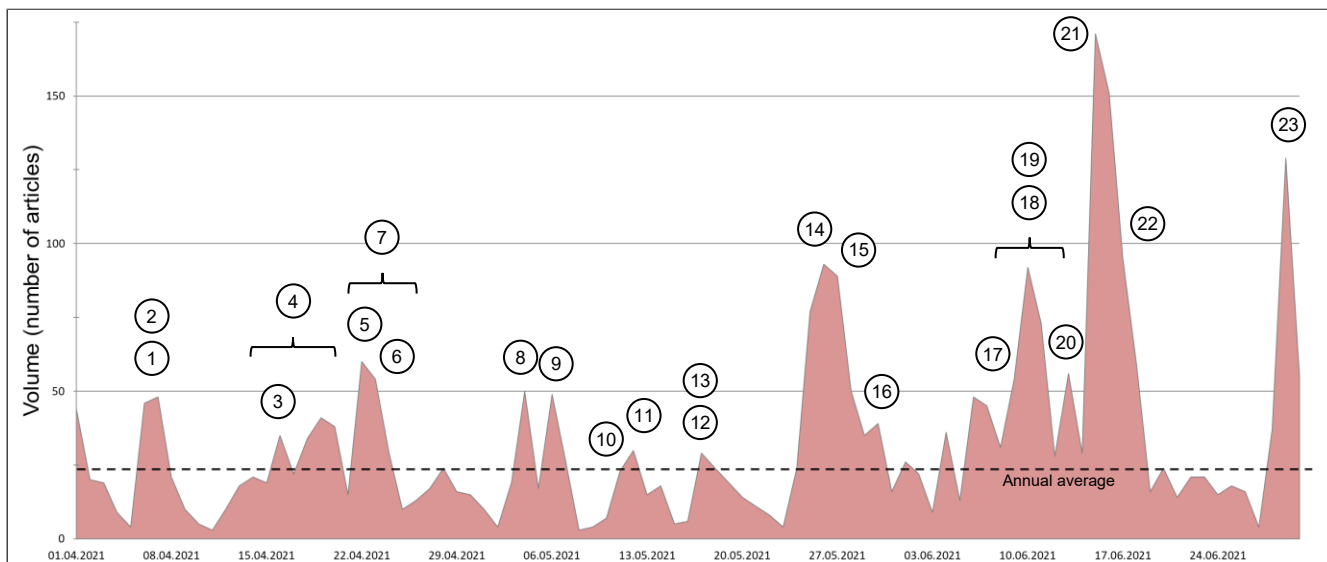


Press conference of US President Joe Biden with a view of Lake Geneva.
(© *The New York Times*)



President of the Swiss Confederation Guy Parmelin meeting European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for talks.
(© *Les Echos*)

Quantitative trends in foreign media coverage of Switzerland



Changes in the volume and tone of foreign media coverage of Switzerland (volume = number of articles per day in the leading media analysed, 01.04.2021 – 30.06.2021). A spike can correspond to multiple events. The numbered events have been selected on the basis of their volume and significance.

(1) Death of Hans Küng (2) Credit Suisse multi-billion losses (3) US no longer views Switzerland as currency manipulator (4) COVID-19: easing of restrictions (5) Credit Suisse affair: further developments (6) Swiss-EU institutional agreement talks (7) COVID-19: delta variant in Switzerland (8) Death of Swiss embassy staff member in Iran (9) US campaign for COVID vaccine patent waiver (10) Swiss-EU institutional agreement (11) Various reports on Swiss financial centre (12) WEF cancellation (13) Swiss-EU relations (14) Announcement of Biden-Putin summit in Geneva (15) Breaking off of Swiss-EU institutional agreement negotiations (16) Accidental death of motorcycle racer Jason Dupasquier (17) Vladislav Klyushin's arrest becomes known to the public (18) Reporting in the run-up to the 13th June referendums (19) Reporting in the run-up to the Biden-Putin summit in Geneva (20) 13th June referendums (21) Biden-Putin summit in Geneva (22) Federal Criminal Court sentences Liberian for war crimes committed during Liberian civil war (23) Switzerland's victory in Euro 2020 last sixteen

Focus: How direct democracy influences Switzerland's perception

The fact that the Swiss electorate is actively involved in political events shapes both Switzerland and its perception abroad. One of the cornerstones of Switzerland's positive image is its governance, which people rank as excellent – as is exemplified by the second place in the *Nation Brand Index 2020*. This has led to a growing interest in Switzerland's experiences with the governing instruments provided by direct democracy. For example, foreign media almost always report on Swiss referendums particularly when they concern issues that are also being discussed in other countries. In these instances, the pros and cons of direct democracy are always included in the analysis.

“The Swiss referendum on lockdown rules shames Britain’s authoritarian stance. Switzerland trusts the Swiss people to decide what is best for them”
(*The Telegraph*, UK)

This can be seen in the referendums of 13th June. The vote on COVID-19 legislation led a number of foreign media outlets to praise the fact that Switzerland is the only country so far to allow the people to have a say on public health policy during this pandemic. Several articles also examined the possible reasons for the rejection of the CO₂ initiative, concluding that it would be difficult to pass an incentive tax levied on individuals in the popular vote format. Such reporting not only gives visibility to Switzerland's unique political system, but also showcases the actual proposals and policy approaches currently under discussion to a global audience. In contrast, laws directly implemented by national governments abroad rarely receive as much media attention. Regular coverage of Swiss referendums thus contributes in several ways to the positive image of Switzerland's governance.

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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