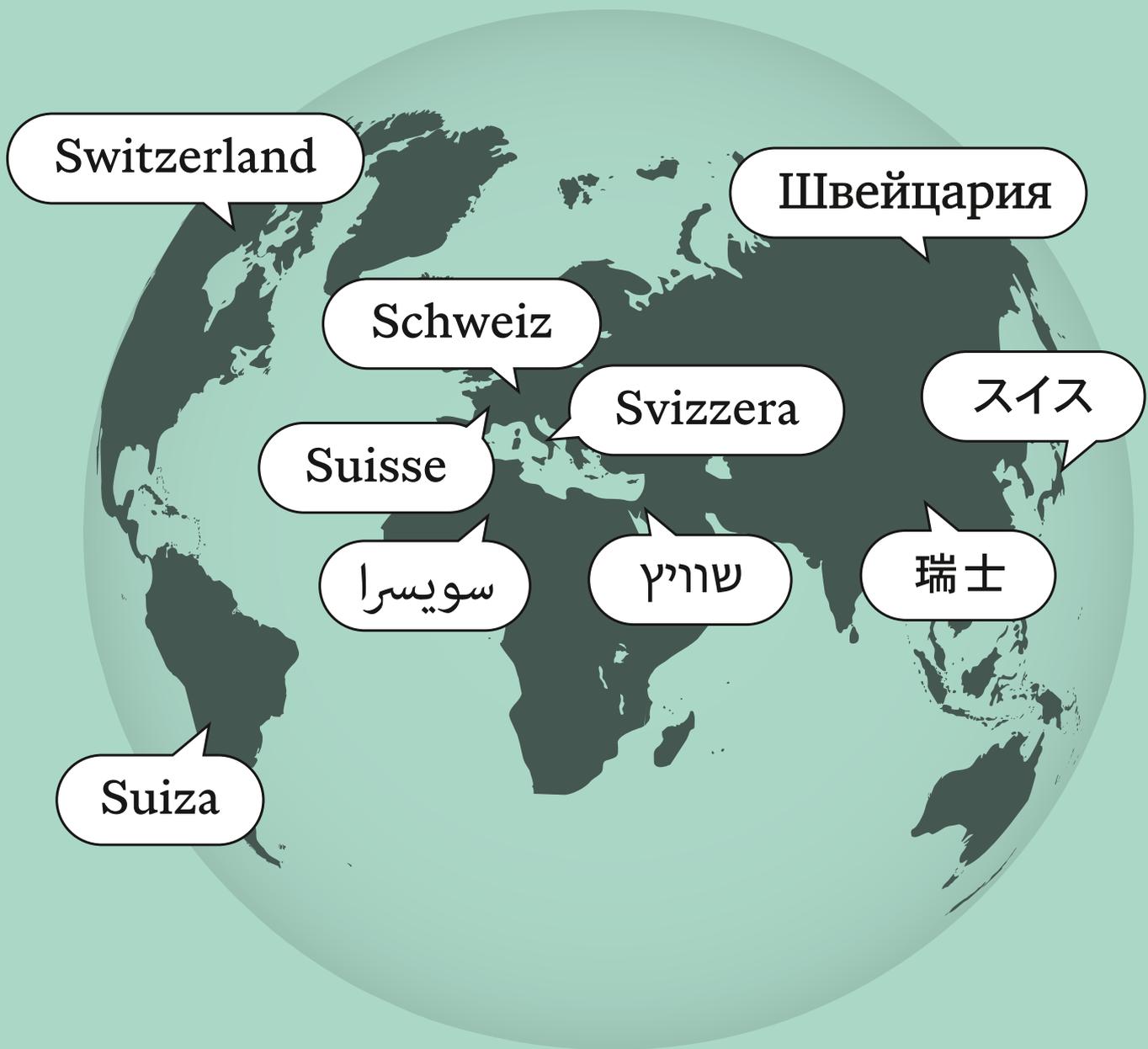


2024 Analysis

# Switzerland seen from abroad



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA  
General Secretariat GS-FDFA  
Presence Switzerland

# Key points in brief

- Overall, there was less intensive foreign media coverage of Switzerland in 2024 and, crucially, its tone was less critical than in the previous two years. Switzerland's image among the general public abroad remains very positive. Those are two key findings of this analysis of how Switzerland is seen internationally, examining perceptions of Switzerland by the foreign media and the public abroad in 2024.
- The Summit on Peace in Ukraine at the Bürgenstock resort was the event involving Switzerland that attracted by far the biggest response in the foreign media in 2024. As in previous years, therefore, Swiss foreign policy and the country's work on highly topical international issues continued to play a key role in the media's portrayal and public perception of Switzerland abroad. In this context, it is also striking that the assessment of Swiss neutrality among the general public abroad improved again in 2024 compared with 2022, when they took a more negative view for a time following the start of Russia's attack on Ukraine.

- The general public abroad has an excellent overall impression of Switzerland. According to Presence Switzerland's Image Monitor 2024, it comes out on top when compared with seven benchmark countries in this regard. For most substantive aspects also, the public's perception of Switzerland has remained much the same as in the 2022 results or has improved. Respondents cited, among other things, the country's innovative strength and the stable economic situation as reasons for their better impression of Switzerland. Switzerland is also spontaneously associated for the most part with very positive but sometimes stereotypical characteristics such as mountains, scenic beauty and prosperity.
- The familiar pattern whereby perceptions of Switzerland in neighbouring countries are often somewhat more nuanced and sometimes rather more critical than in countries farther afield was also repeated. The farther away a country is geographically and culturally, the more its view of Switzerland is shaped by common stereotypes and clichés.

## Presence Switzerland

As a unit within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Presence Switzerland is responsible for Switzerland's communication abroad. To help safeguard Switzerland's interests around the world, Presence Switzerland systematically analyses Switzerland's image abroad and implements communication measures tailored to specific target audiences. The communication tools used by Presence Switzerland encompass a range of activities. These include the execution of thematic campaigns, digital initiatives, and representing Switzerland at world expos. Presence Switzerland also manages the House of Switzerland at major international events, and oversees the implementation of communication projects, welcoming delegations to Switzerland, and media relations. The Federal Council regularly sets out the strategy for Switzerland's communication abroad.

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# Overview

How was Switzerland perceived abroad in 2024? Which issues and events attracted attention beyond the country's borders? How were they reported and did this have an impact on the perception of the country as a whole? This analysis by Presence Switzerland explores these questions. It highlights the fact that national images are complex things. They do not always correspond to reality or the country's own self-image.

This report examines two aspects of how Switzerland is perceived abroad. The first part looks at the presentation of Switzerland in leading foreign media outlets and on social media. The central question here is how Switzerland was presented to the general public in media reporting, which is influenced by recent events. The extent to which a country is the focus of international reporting can vary from year to year. On the one hand, it often depends on which stories are dominating the global media headlines and how the country in question behaves on these issues. On the other hand, events in the country itself that are considered internationally relevant affect the extent of media coverage. It should be noted that media coverage follows its own logic and is not representative of what is actually happening or of the public's overall perception. Thus, critical developments or emotionally moving stories usually receive more media coverage than largely uncontroversial factual topics that are not deemed newsworthy. In this light, the second part focuses on Switzerland's image among populations abroad. The results are based on the Image Monitor 2024, a representative population survey which Presence Switzerland conducted in 18 selected countries between 15 January and 9 February 2024. Comparing the perspective of the foreign media and the public's perceptions makes it possible to identify similarities, differences and interactions between the two.

2024 was a good year for Switzerland's image. The country was perceived very positively by the general public abroad, in terms of both overall perceptions and aspects that were viewed rather more critically in previous years, such as neutrality. In this regard, Switzerland also performed excellently when compared with similar countries. Meanwhile, foreign media outlets not only wrote less about Switzerland than in previous years but, crucially, their tone was also less critical. There are a number of reasons for this. In the context of the war in Ukraine, Switzerland's actions in 2024 were regarded as less contentious than in previous years. Its positioning on the Middle East conflict was not highlighted in the foreign media in 2024. In addition, the Swiss financial centre was less affected by events with global reach in 2024 than the previous year, when UBS's emergency takeover of Credit Suisse prompted a huge media response. Conversely, Switzerland's hosting of the Summit on Peace in Ukraine at the Bürgenstock resort saw its good offices receive more international media coverage in 2024 than at any time since the Biden–Putin summit in Geneva in 2021.

Perceptions of Switzerland among the general public abroad remain very positive and stable. On average, Switzerland does very well both in terms of the overall impression and in individual areas such as the political system and quality of life and location and also as a financial centre. Its neutrality is also being viewed more positively again after a temporary dip in perceptions of this issue. The country's role in Europe continues to elicit some scepticism among the public abroad. In the following, we will first discuss foreign media coverage of Switzerland and then the population's perceptions.

# Switzerland through the eyes of the foreign media

# “Ukraine-Konferenz in der Schweiz: Mitten im Krieg ist ein Anfang für Frieden gemacht”

Der Standard, Austria, 16/06/2024

## “Swiss Fantasy: Ukraine-Russia peace conference without Moscow in the room, is more spectacle than substance”

Times of India, India, 17/06/2024

## “Die Hand für die Lösung internationaler Konflikte zu reichen gehört zum Selbstverständnis der neutralen Schweiz. Zugleich bot sich die Möglichkeit, das stark angekratzte Image des Landes etwas aufzupolieren.”

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany, 15/06/2024

## Geopolitics, neutrality and good offices

Topics directly or indirectly related to the war in Ukraine continued to account for a substantial proportion of foreign media coverage of Switzerland in 2024. These included Swiss neutrality, good offices and Swiss security policy. Many media outlets continued to cover these issues frequently in 2024, but with a less critical tone than in previous years. The story that generated the most coverage of Switzerland in 2024 was the **Summit on Peace in Ukraine** at the Bürgenstock resort. Even the announcement of the event during Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to Switzerland in January made headlines around the world. When the Federal Council confirmed in early April that the summit would be held in June, some media outlets took this as a gesture of solidarity with Ukraine. The ensuing months leading up to the summit saw a flurry of reporting. In advance of the event, coverage centred on which key states would (and would not) attend and with what level of representation. During and immediately after the summit, most of the international reporting focused on interpreting its results. These elicited mixed reactions in the media in most parts of the world, with assessments ranging from recognition of the event as a valuable intermediate step for future negotiations through to real scepticism about a summit not involving Russia. Russian media almost universally reported very critically on the conference, claiming it had failed.

While Switzerland itself was rarely the focus of the coverage, it was consistently mentioned as the conference host and often praised for its role. Switzerland earned praise for attracting a wide array of countries to participate and for orchestrating the event seamlessly with robust security arrangements. This gave Switzerland's good offices global visibility. In stark contrast, the Russian media once again took a different line, judging that Switzerland had proved incapable of organising such events.

Foreign media occasionally also addressed other aspects of Switzerland's actions in the context of the **war in Ukraine**. For instance, Switzerland's perceived sympathetic attitude towards the Chinese-Brazilian peace plan received some attention, particularly in the countries directly concerned. The factual reporting

# “La Suisse a eu le courage de sortir de sa neutralité en adoptant la plupart des sanctions.”

Le Monde, France, 31/10/2024

mainly highlighted the Ukrainian government’s reaction of incomprehension to the Swiss position on the plan. Western media outlets also continued to show an interest in Switzerland’s implementation of sanctions. They reported repeatedly and in various connections on allegations that Swiss companies, lawyers and banks were getting around sanctions against Russia. However, there was significantly less of this critical coverage than the previous year.

Foreign media also devoted attention to Switzerland’s **good offices** in other areas, for example the US-led talks in Geneva on the war in Sudan. In addition, they continued to focus on Swiss **neutrality** in various contexts. For example, several articles provided objective coverage of the report of the **security policy** study commission appointed by the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS), noting that the report proposed closer Swiss cooperation with NATO and the EU. Some media outlets pointed out in their articles that these recommendations were controversial on the domestic front, as their implementation would require a shift in the traditional interpretation of Swiss neutrality. Meanwhile, Russian media also spread the narrative that Switzerland was no longer neutral. Public perceptions of Swiss neutrality are discussed in the section on ‘Switzerland’s image among populations abroad’.

Unlike with the war in Ukraine, Switzerland’s positioning on the Middle East conflict received little specific attention in the media. Only **protests** about this at universities also in Switzerland attracted sporadic interest, mostly focusing on demonstrations at the University of Lausanne, which also garnered a lot of attention on social media. The ban on Hamas was also occasionally discussed.

# “Der einst ‘sichere Hafen’ Europas war nicht nur dem politischen Befehl aus Übersee nicht gewachsen, er zeigte auch seine völlige Unfähigkeit, als ernsthafte Plattform für internationale Verhandlungen zu fungieren.”

Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Russia, 16/06/2024  
(quote originally in Russian)

“Es gibt wahrscheinlich wenige Verhandlungspartner, die so schwierig sind wie die Eidgenossen. Das hat nicht mit ihrem Charakter zu tun, sondern ganz einfach damit, dass die Schweizer Regierung und das Parlament wissen, dass ihr Chef tatsächlich das Schweizer Volk ist.”

Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany, 18/03/2024

“UE-Suisse : l'accord historique face au mur des référendums”

Le Point, France, 20/12/2024

## Switzerland and Europe

For most of the year, **relations between Switzerland and the EU** were rarely covered in foreign reporting, despite ongoing negotiations on the future shape of this relationship. The conclusion of the negotiations between Switzerland and the EU in December also received only moderate media attention abroad, most of it restricted to factual treatment of the subject. Most reporting was by media outlets in neighbouring countries as well as some European media with a particular interest in European policy developments. Before the end of the negotiations, they highlighted the economic benefits of the proposed agreement package for Switzerland as well as domestic political resistance. The media welcomed the successful conclusion of the negotiations, with some describing the agreement as historic. Some articles from neighbouring countries emphasised that this was a favourable outcome and an opportunity for Switzerland, pointing out that the EU had made a number of concessions to Switzerland in areas such as immigration and research. However, they also stressed the fact that the agreement still had to be ratified. In this light, many media outlets examined the domestic political situation and the arguments put forward by the multifarious opponents of the deal. They tended to be sceptical about any Swiss referendum on the subject, the general view being that widespread scepticism towards the EU in Switzerland made it questionable whether the Swiss population would approve the agreement in a vote.

In Spain, one specific issue that saw Switzerland regularly featuring in the media was the **Catalan independence movement**. The Spanish media regularly discussed the role of Switzerland and especially Geneva as a place of refuge for Catalan activists. Accordingly, the articles on Switzerland were for the most part factual, but sometimes also polarised. For example, the fact that the Federal Office of Justice did not grant a Spanish request for mutual legal assistance to locate a Catalan activist attracted a range of responses. Also the talks – controversial in Spain – that took place in Geneva between the Spanish government and leading members of the Catalan independence movement meant that Switzerland kept hitting the headlines, although the focus of the reporting was not on Switzerland itself.

“La Corte ha affermato che gli sforzi della Svizzera per raggiungere i suoi obiettivi di riduzione delle emissioni sono stati tristemente inadeguati.”

Repubblica, Italy, 09/04/2024

“Prosecutors probe allegations of fake voter rolls in Switzerland’s vaunted direct democracy”

Associated Press, United States, 03/09/2024

## Direct democracy and Swiss politics

Switzerland’s political system and its direct democracy are world-renowned, and this is a recurring topic of interest for foreign media. In 2024, alongside the usual reporting on selected national popular votes, there was media interest in the international integration of the political system as well as points of conflict arising from it. For instance, the **European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling** that Switzerland had not done enough to combat climate change, thereby violating the human rights of the plaintiffs from the Swiss Senior Women for Climate Protection, also known as the **‘Climate Seniors’**, sparked a huge media response. Many media outlets regarded this as a precedent-setting judgment. The majority of the reports themselves were objective, but the ECHR’s rebuke of Switzerland captured significant media interest. However, some media outlets criticised the ECHR and accused the court of potentially undermining democratic processes with its ruling. The potential consequences of the judgment for other countries were also discussed. Subsequently, some European media in particular also reported on the declarations passed by the National Council and Council of States refusing to comply with the ruling. These reports speculated on whether Switzerland’s stance might diminish the court’s authority and the impact of its rulings in other countries.

Compared with previous years, there was relatively modest media interest in the various **federal popular votes** held in Switzerland in 2024. One exception was the considerable focus on the approval of the initiative for a 13th old age and survivors’ insurance (OASI) pension payment in the popular vote held on 3 March. Foreign media expressed surprise at the clear margin by which the proposal was accepted, describing the result of this vote as historic. Many articles emphasised how very unusual it was in business-friendly Switzerland for popular initiatives from the political left to be successful at the ballot box. The approval of the initiative also led to discussions in Switzerland’s neighbouring countries about their own situation. Later in the year, foreign media also reported on the approval of the Federal Electricity Supply Act in the popular vote held on 9 June. They noted that Switzerland was towards the bottom of the European rankings for renewables and that the planned measures were needed to ensure independ-

ence from electricity imports. The rejection of the Biodiversity Initiative on 22 September was covered by media worldwide. Most of the reporting was objective, but there was the odd critical piece, with some interpreting the result as a vote against nature conservation. The popular vote of 24 November against the expansion of the national road network caused astonishment. In Germany in particular, some media outlets welcomed the result, viewing it as a catalyst for German transport policy. Other national popular votes generated only occasional media reports. As well as these votes from 2024, foreign media addressed some upcoming **initiatives** of particular interest from an outside perspective. The Immigration Initiative, the Neutrality Initiative and the Inheritance Tax Initiative attracted especial interest abroad. The tone of the reporting here varied depending on the media outlet's orientation and place of origin, although the prevailing underlying attitude was one of scepticism towards all three initiatives.

Switzerland's **direct democracy** more generally also garnered media interest abroad. Several articles provided objective coverage of suspected irregularities in the commercial collection of signatures for popular initiatives in Switzerland, portraying Switzerland's political system as unique and in fundamentally positive terms, but at times critical of possible weaknesses. The Federal Council's proposal, as set out in its position on a popular initiative, to **lift the ban on the construction of new nuclear power plants** also attracted attention in the foreign media. The vast majority of the reports explained objectively how the Federal Council justified these considerations, referring to similar debates in other European countries. A few outlets criticised the Federal Council's deliberations as representing a reversal of the popular vote held seven years ago.

## Business and financial centre

In 2024, developments involving the Swiss financial centre received relatively little coverage in the foreign media. This stands in stark contrast to the previous year, when in particular Credit Suisse (CS) and its takeover by UBS triggered a huge amount of often critical reporting worldwide. Unsurprisingly, coverage of the **financial centre** in 2024 was still to some extent overshadowed by these developments. For example, a study by the consulting firm Deloitte, which found an erosion of trust in the Swiss financial centre following the CS takeover, received a lot of attention. The decision by the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) not to approve UBS's emergency plans and the competitive pressure in the sector also attracted extensive media coverage. Parallels with the CS case were also drawn following the resignation of the CEO of Julius Bär, another company where credit losses caused by negligent risk management were seen as damaging trust in the Swiss financial centre. At the end of the year, the findings of the Parliamentary Investigation Committee (PInC) on 'Management by the authorities – CS emergency merger' attracted some attention from foreign media. The coverage extensively cited the committee's criticism of the Swiss authorities and supervisory bodies, which were accused of numerous failures. At the same time, the reporting highlighted the fact that the PInC placed responsibility for the big bank's collapse with the management and board of directors, rather than the authorities. There was also occasional critical coverage of the Swiss financial centre unrelated to CS, such as reports on the measures taken by FINMA against the banks Mirabaud & Cie, Lombard Odier and HSBC Private Bank (Suisse) SA for breaches of anti-money laundering rules.

Negotiations on various **free trade agreements** involving Switzerland also received some exposure. In particular, many media outlets around the world reported, for the most part factually, on the successful conclusion of negotiations between the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states and India. In India itself, reporting was particularly extensive and generally positive. As well as analysing the impact on specific sectors and products, the international media focused heavily on the billions of euros of investment pledged to India. They also emphasised that this was India's first free trade agreement with European countries and the first to explicitly reference sustainability standards. In addition, foreign media picked up on Switzerland and China's plans to expand their

# “Swiss lawmakers criticise ‘years of mismanagement’ at Credit Suisse”

Financial Times, United Kingdom, 20/12/2024

free trade agreement to mark its 10th anniversary. While the tone of the articles in China was mostly positive, reporting in the United States and European countries included occasional criticism of Switzerland: given the changed geopolitical context and the US sanctions against Chinese companies, some media outlets considered this lone manoeuvre by Switzerland to be a risky undertaking.

# “Switzerland Stakes Its Claim As Europe’s Hottest Tech Centre”

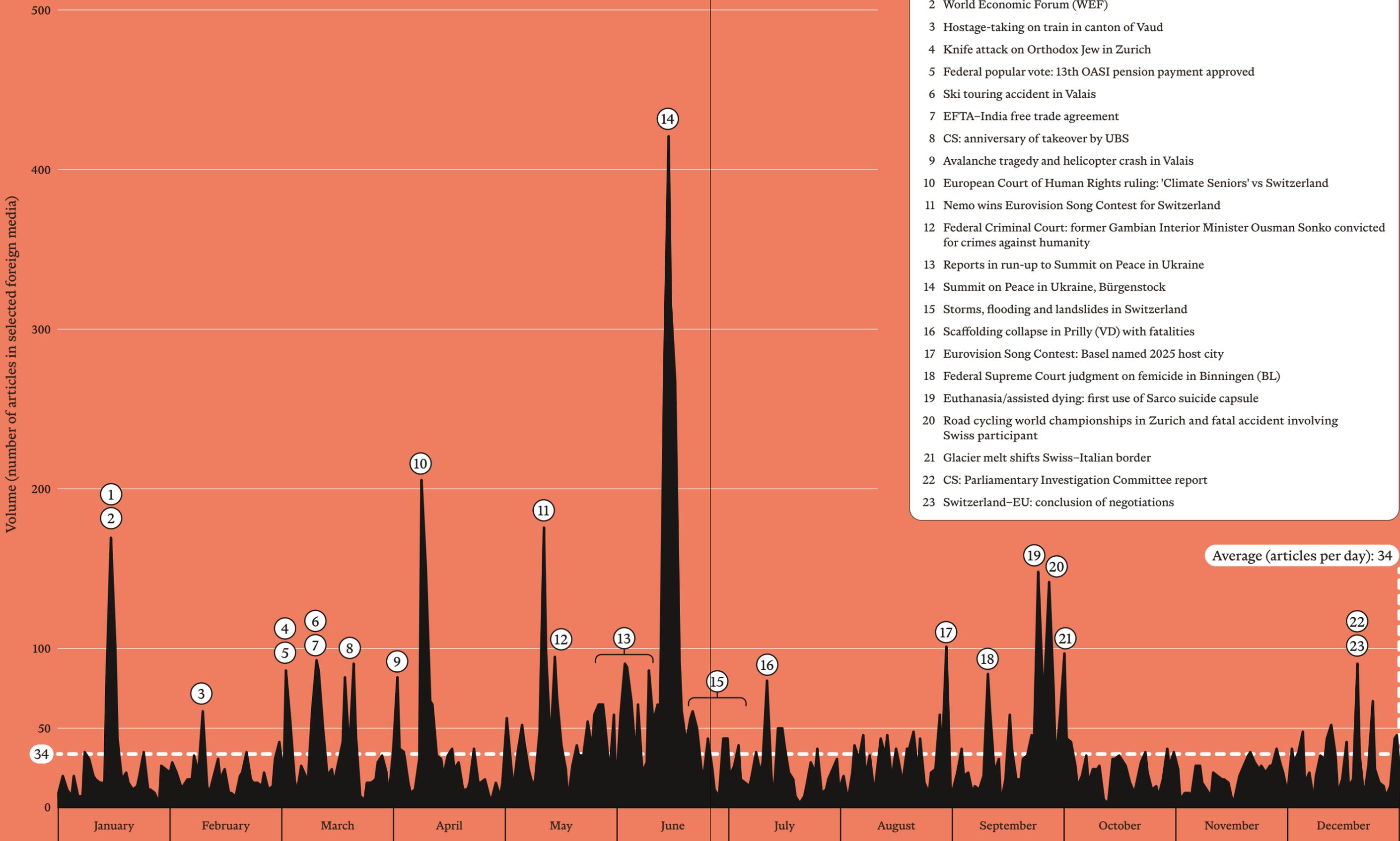
Forbes, United States, 14/11/2024

# “Switzerland Is Getting Squeezed Between China and the US: The country’s go-it-alone approach looks increasingly untenable in a changed geopolitical environment.”

Bloomberg, United States, 20/08/2024

# Infographic 1

## Trends in foreign media coverage of Switzerland in 2024



Chronological listing of key Swiss-related events in the foreign press. The numbered events have been selected and explained further in the report based on their volume and significance.

- 1 Visit of President Zelenskyy to Switzerland and announcement of Summit on Peace in Ukraine
- 2 World Economic Forum (WEF)
- 3 Hostage-taking on train in canton of Vaud
- 4 Knife attack on Orthodox Jew in Zurich
- 5 Federal popular vote: 13th OASI pension payment approved
- 6 Ski touring accident in Valais
- 7 EFTA-India free trade agreement
- 8 CS: anniversary of takeover by UBS
- 9 Avalanche tragedy and helicopter crash in Valais
- 10 European Court of Human Rights ruling: 'Climate Seniors' vs Switzerland
- 11 Nemo wins Eurovision Song Contest for Switzerland
- 12 Federal Criminal Court: former Gambian Interior Minister Ousman Sonko convicted for crimes against humanity
- 13 Reports in run-up to Summit on Peace in Ukraine
- 14 Summit on Peace in Ukraine, Bürgenstock
- 15 Storms, flooding and landslides in Switzerland
- 16 Scaffolding collapse in Prilly (VD) with fatalities
- 17 Eurovision Song Contest: Basel named 2025 host city
- 18 Federal Supreme Court judgment on femicide in Binningen (BL)
- 19 Euthanasia/assisted dying: first use of Sarco suicide capsule
- 20 Road cycling world championships in Zurich and fatal accident involving Swiss participant
- 21 Glacier melt shifts Swiss-Italian border
- 22 CS: Parliamentary Investigation Committee report
- 23 Switzerland-EU: conclusion of negotiations

# “How Marc Rich’s Former Haven Put a Commodity Trader on Trial: Trafigura bribery trial shows shifting stance in Switzerland”

Bloomberg, United States, 14/12/2024

# “An Enforcer for a Strongman President Goes on Trial in Milestone Swiss Case”

New York Times, United States, 08/01/2024

## Justice

Various investigations by the Swiss authorities and the associated court cases also found their way into foreign media coverage in 2024, drawing attention to the Swiss judiciary. A relatively large number of column inches was taken up by **proceedings against commodities groups**. For example, many media outlets reported on the conviction of the Swiss-based commodities group Glencore by the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland in relation to a corruption scandal in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In connection with the Federal Criminal Court case brought against the Geneva-based commodities trader Trafigura for alleged bribery in Angola, several media outlets commented positively on the fact that, contrary to its previous practice, the Swiss judiciary had also targeted commodity sector managers in this case.

There was also coverage of the **trial of former Gambian Interior Minister Ousman Sonko** at the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona. Media reporting emphasised above all that the trial sent a positive signal with regard to global efforts to prosecute war crimes. In this connection, some foreign media commented that, according to NGOs, Switzerland had not hitherto distinguished itself in prosecuting international crime compared with other European countries. Many foreign media also reported on the Federal Criminal Court trial of two Geneva business-people relating to the 1MDB corruption scandal involving the Malaysian sovereign wealth fund of that name. Another story covered by the foreign media was that of the Vaud police officers accused of the death of Nigerian citizen Mike Ben Peter, and their acquittal by the Court of Appeal. The tone here ranged from factual to more critical, with parallels being drawn with the case of George Floyd in the United States. In the winter, the Zurich Supreme Court trial of German cum-ex whistleblower Eckart Seith received a lot of attention in the German media. While the abandonment of the trial was viewed positively for the most part, some leading German media outlets voiced sharp criticism of Switzerland. In connection with these proceedings, the country was portrayed as lagging behind in the protection of whistleblowers and also as a potential haven for financial crime.

“While assisted dying is legally protected in some circumstances in Switzerland, it is strictly regulated and the Sarco pod has encountered opposition.”

BBC, United Kingdom, 24/09/2024

## Society

The perception of Switzerland abroad is not only shaped by politics and economics. Social factors, too, have an impact on its image. Switzerland often attracts positive coverage in this regard, for example in connection with its high standard of living. However, other social issues, such as antisemitic incidents in Switzerland and **euthanasia/assisted dying**, also led to contentious or critical media reports in 2024. While euthanasia/assisted dying is regularly discussed in connection with Switzerland, it garnered somewhat more foreign media coverage in 2024 than in previous years, driven by the debate about the ‘Sarco’ suicide capsule. Many foreign media outlets reported on its first use, in a generally objective manner, emphasising that, although euthanasia/assisted dying is handled more liberally in Switzerland than in other countries, it is strictly regulated. Reports also noted the Federal Council’s position that the use of the suicide capsule contravened Swiss law, and thus pointed out that its use had caused a stir in Switzerland too. The media also took up the issue in the context of developments in other countries, such as the debate surrounding the regulation of assisted dying in the UK. Coverage of the topic frequently centred around foreigners who were planning to, or had, come to Switzerland for euthanasia or an assisted death, as in the case of Brazilian poet Antônio Cícero. The reporting was generally objective.

Several articles, particularly from Southern Europe and neighbouring countries, turned the spotlight on **living in Switzerland**, describing the experiences of people who had emigrated to Switzerland from the perspective of those involved. In many cases, posts on social media such as TikTok by the individuals concerned triggered the coverage in their home countries. In terms of content, most of the articles revolved around practical tips and assistance for new arrivals or accounts of everyday life in Switzerland. However, sometimes there was also critical treatment of issues such as the Swiss public’s prejudices towards various migrant groups. The communication of such personal day-to-day experiences can play a role in perceptions of Switzerland in the respective countries. As will become clear in the section on ‘Switzerland’s image among populations abroad’, the public abroad also often associates Switzerland with prosperity and a good quality of life. At the same time, the Swiss population is not viewed as particularly friendly or cosmopolitan, especially by people in neighbouring countries.

Against the backdrop of a generally heightened sensitivity towards **antisemitic incidents** in the context of the Middle East conflict, foreign media also reported on the occurrence of such cases in Switzerland. One example involved accusations of antisemitism at the beginning of 2024 in connection with a notice posted by a mountain station in Davos, stating that it would no longer rent sports equipment to Jewish guests because of negative experiences. In highlighting this, several reports pointed to similar previous incidents in Swiss tourist areas. A knife attack on an Orthodox Jew in Zurich by a 15-year-old Swiss male with Tunisian roots also received a great deal of attention. The reporting remained mostly factual and Switzerland was not accused of being generally antisemitic. However, some German media outlets discussed a study by the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities and the Foundation Against Racism and Antisemitism (GRA), according to which antisemitic incidents in Switzerland had risen sharply after 7 October 2023.

“Travail, salaire,  
cadre de vie...  
‘Ce que j’ai gagné  
en m’installant en  
Suisse à 25 ans’”

Les Echos, France, 24/11/2024

# “Switzerland Wins Eurovision, as Protests Give Way to Spectacle”

New York Times, United States, 11/05/2024

# “Au festival Images de Vevey, une édition exceptionnelle pour une manifestation originale”

Le Monde, France, 14/09/2024

# “Swiss ‘AI Jesus’ project to bridge digital and the divine draws users’ praise, as questions remain”

The Hindu, India, 28/11/2024

## Culture

A country’s art and culture also affect how it is viewed abroad. The standout news story for Swiss culture in 2024 was Switzerland’s representative **Nemo winning the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC)**. This generated positive media coverage around the world, emphasising, among other things, the quality of the song. The media also made much of the fact that Nemo was the first openly non-binary person to win the competition. In this context, leading German and British media outlets in particular highlighted Nemo’s pledge to champion non-binary rights, especially the introduction of a third gender option in the Swiss civil register. Nemo’s non-binary gender identity also triggered a range of responses on social media platforms, including some contentious and provocative comments. Switzerland winning the 2024 ESC means that it will host the event in 2025. Foreign media reported on the choice of venue and also on the resistance in some Swiss cities to plans to host the event. Ultimately, the selection of Basel as the host city and the subsequent local referendum secured by the Christian/conservative Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland (EDU) with a view to blocking funding for the event attracted a lot of attention. Basel residents’ vote in favour of hosting the ESC in this referendum was also widely reported.

Aside from the Swiss success at the ESC, there were hardly any individual culture stories that attracted such widespread coverage of Switzerland. However, foreign media did regularly cover a range of events and activities. In this connection, they showed some interest in various **Swiss festivals**, for example the photography biennial Festival Images de Vevey, which attracted rave reviews from many French media outlets. Several articles were also devoted to the Locarno Film Festival, with the focus mainly on specific films or individuals such as Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan. The art installation **Deus in Machina** in St Peter’s Chapel in Lucerne, which saw an AI-controlled hologram of Jesus answer spiritual questions, also garnered considerable attention around the world.

# “Dans le Tessin, le sort incertain des villages alpins menacés par les éboulements”

Le Monde, France, 15/08/2024

“En Suisse, les secrets de l'impressionnante réussite des écoles polytechniques: A Lausanne et Zurich, l'EPFL et l'ETHZ se classent parmi les meilleurs établissements de la planète, et attirent en masse les étudiants français.”

L'Express, France, 13/11/2024

## Other issues

In addition to the areas discussed above, in 2024, as every year, there were a number of other specific events and stories concerning Switzerland that were deemed relevant by the foreign media and attracted coverage. Throughout the year, the **impact of climate change** on Switzerland received a lot of media attention. In this context, the two main issues that repeatedly made the headlines in 2024 were the danger posed to residential areas by storms and landslides and the continuous melting of the country's glaciers. Foreign media outlets frequently reported such events, particularly in July and August when flooding and landslides led to fatalities in Switzerland. In the coverage, Switzerland came across as vulnerable and susceptible to natural disasters. Highlighting the increase in extreme weather events due to climate change, the European media focused among other things on the dangers this posed to Alpine settlements. In connection with the increasing number of rock avalanches caused by thawing permafrost, the media also discussed whether at-risk mountain villages should be abandoned on economic grounds. This came to a head when the village of Brienz in the canton of Graubünden had to be evacuated for a second time because of the risk of landslides – an event which the media also linked to climate change. The ongoing glacier melt also generated a certain amount of coverage throughout the year. Photos shared on social media illustrating the melting of Swiss glaciers were picked up by media around the world and interpreted as a key indicator of climate change. The redrawing of the Swiss–Italian border beneath the Matterhorn caused by melting glaciers also made numerous headlines.

Swiss **education, research and innovation** were covered sporadically by foreign media throughout the year, and in a positive tone. For example, the media reported on various research findings at ETH Zurich and EPFL and on the high quality of Swiss vocational education and training. The ASTRA Bridge mobile construction site bridge went viral on social media, attracting enthusiastic comments from around the world. Meanwhile, **crimes** committed in Switzerland garnered interest beyond the country's borders in 2024 more often than in previous years. Examples include the reporting on the gruesome circumstances of a femicide in Binningen (canton of Basel-Landschaft), the knife attack by a Chinese student on several kindergarten children in Zurich and the hostage-taking on a regional train in the canton of Vaud. Various **accidents** also made the headlines, such as

the collapse of scaffolding in Prilly (canton of Vaud) in which three people died, and a ski touring group that lost their lives in Valais. By contrast, outstanding **sports** achievements played a relatively minor role in reporting in 2024. The organisation of the UCI Road World Championships in Zurich attracted some media attention, but mainly in connection with the fatal accident of 18-year-old Swiss cyclist Muriel Furrer. Various athletes from a wide range of other disciplines also featured occasionally. Following on from this analysis of Switzerland's portrayal in the foreign media, the next few pages look at how perceptions of Switzerland have developed among the general public abroad.

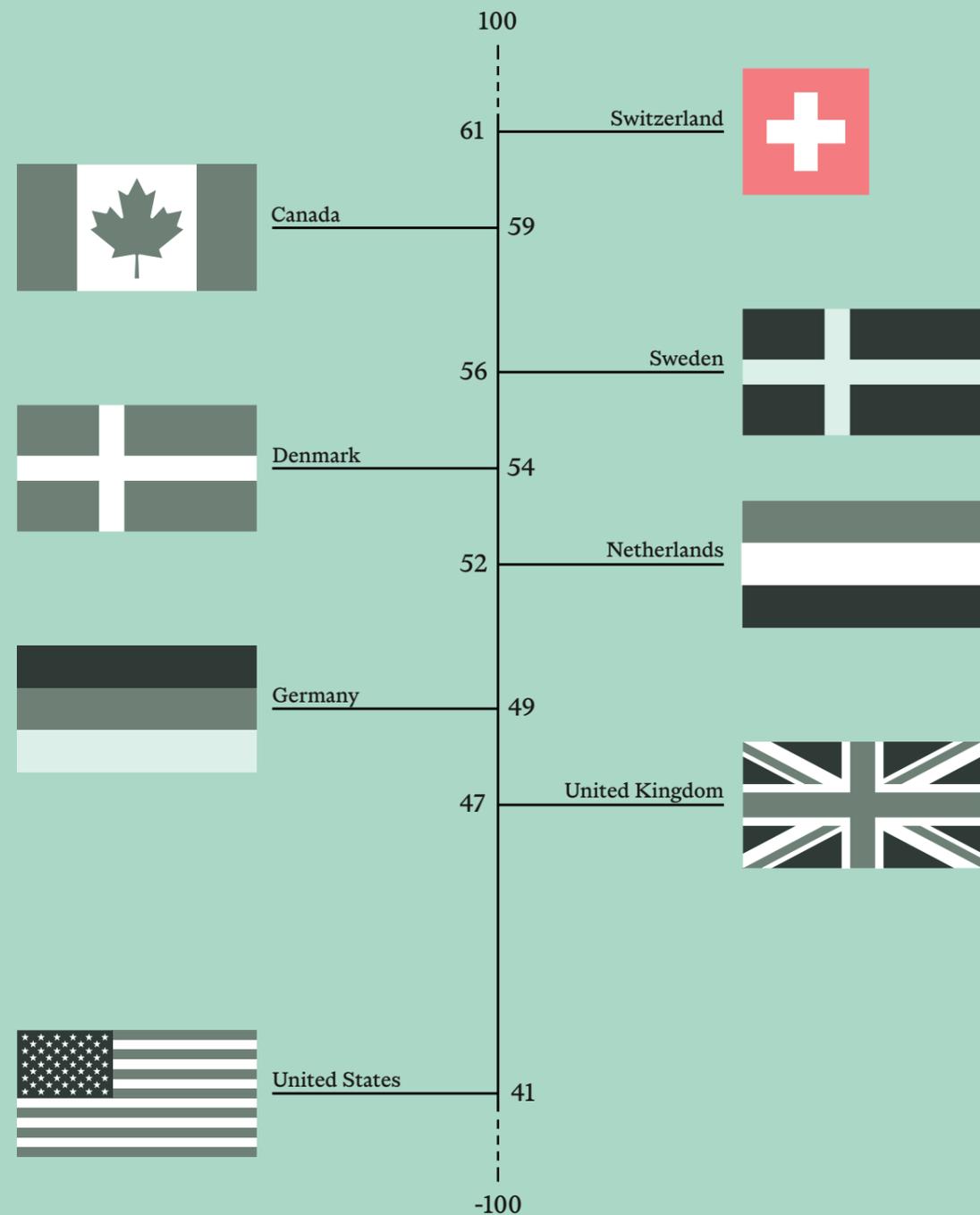
# Switzerland's image among populations abroad

## **Media monitoring by Presence Switzerland**

This media analysis is based on continuous monitoring of all coverage of Switzerland by the leading media outlets of 23 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States), as well as by the leading media in the Arab world and the EU. In addition, other sources may be included in the analysis. Social media content related to Switzerland that was posted by individuals abroad was also analysed.

## Infographic 2 Overall impression of Switzerland in a benchmark comparison

"What is your overall impression of different countries?"



Overall values, calculated from the average of all 18 countries' mean values

Scale: -100 very poor overall impression  
+100 very good overall impression

Note: Visual aids such as maps and flags were used in the overall impression survey to draw respondents' attention to the difference between Switzerland and Sweden.

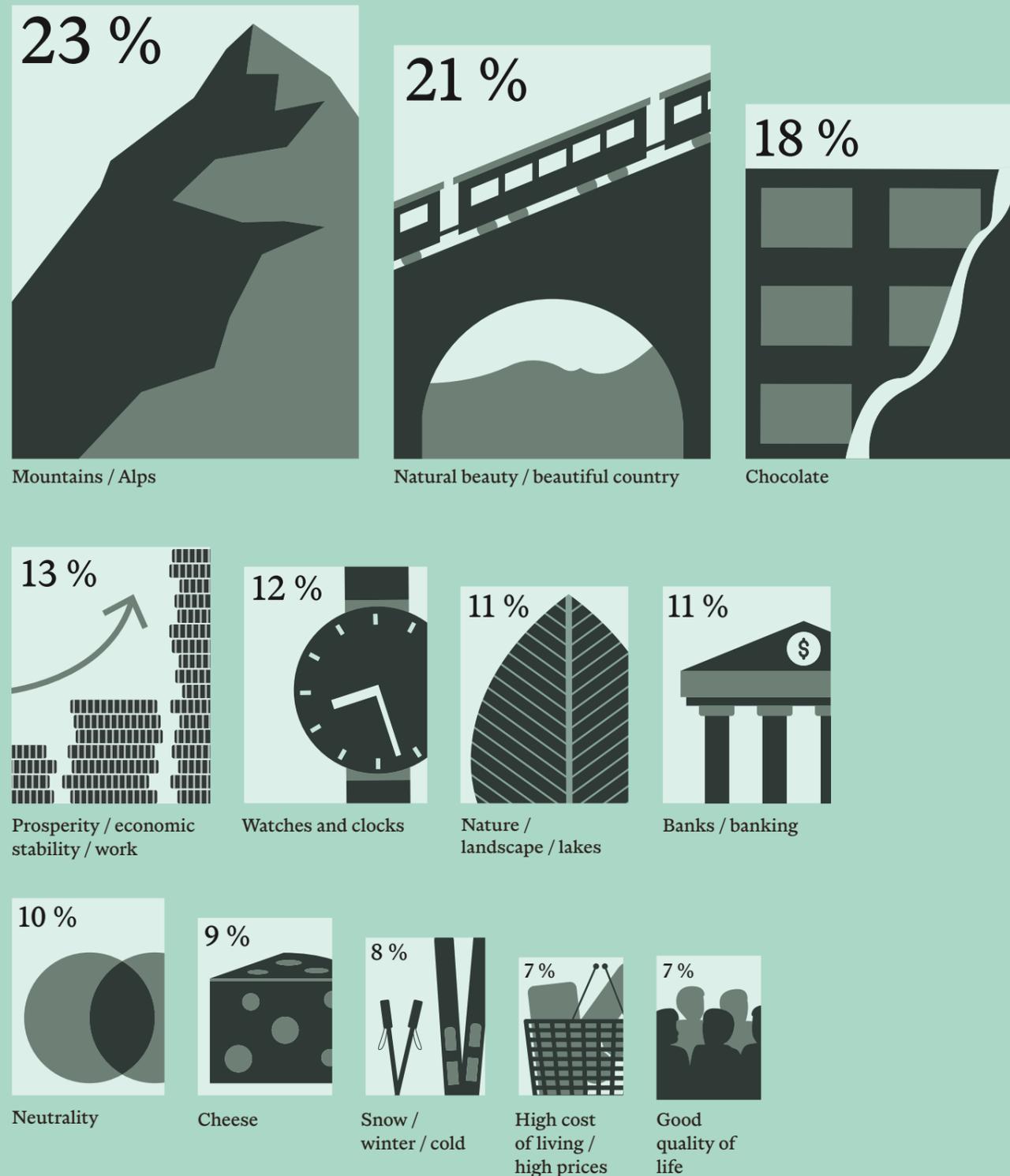
Presence Switzerland's Image Monitor 2024, n = 11'130

The image of Switzerland relayed by the foreign media does not necessarily tally with that held by the general public abroad. While media perceptions are strongly influenced by current events and are therefore liable to fluctuate, the view of Switzerland among people abroad tends to remain stable over the long term. Presence Switzerland's Image Monitor is a representative survey that has been carried out every two years since 2016 (see box). The 2024 survey shows that, overall, Switzerland's image among the public abroad is excellent and has remained stable. One of the key findings is that Switzerland's neutrality is ruffling fewer feathers abroad and is once again perceived more positively than it was shortly after the Russian attack on Ukraine. The Swiss financial centre continues to enjoy a very good reputation even after the UBS takeover of Credit Suisse around two years ago, while Switzerland's role in Europe is still eliciting a certain scepticism. Switzerland is often viewed somewhat more critically by its neighbours than by countries further afield, although in some cases opinions also vary considerably between neighbouring countries.

In terms of overall impression, Switzerland achieved a score of +61.5 points on a scale of -100 to +100, outperforming the group of seven benchmark countries (Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and the US). Since 2022, Switzerland has further extended its lead over second-placed Canada (see infographic 2). It also scored very highly on overall public perception in most of the countries surveyed.

### Infographic 3 Spontaneous associations with Switzerland – overall results

"What immediately springs to mind when you think of Switzerland?"



Figures in per cent of respondents  
Multiple answers possible

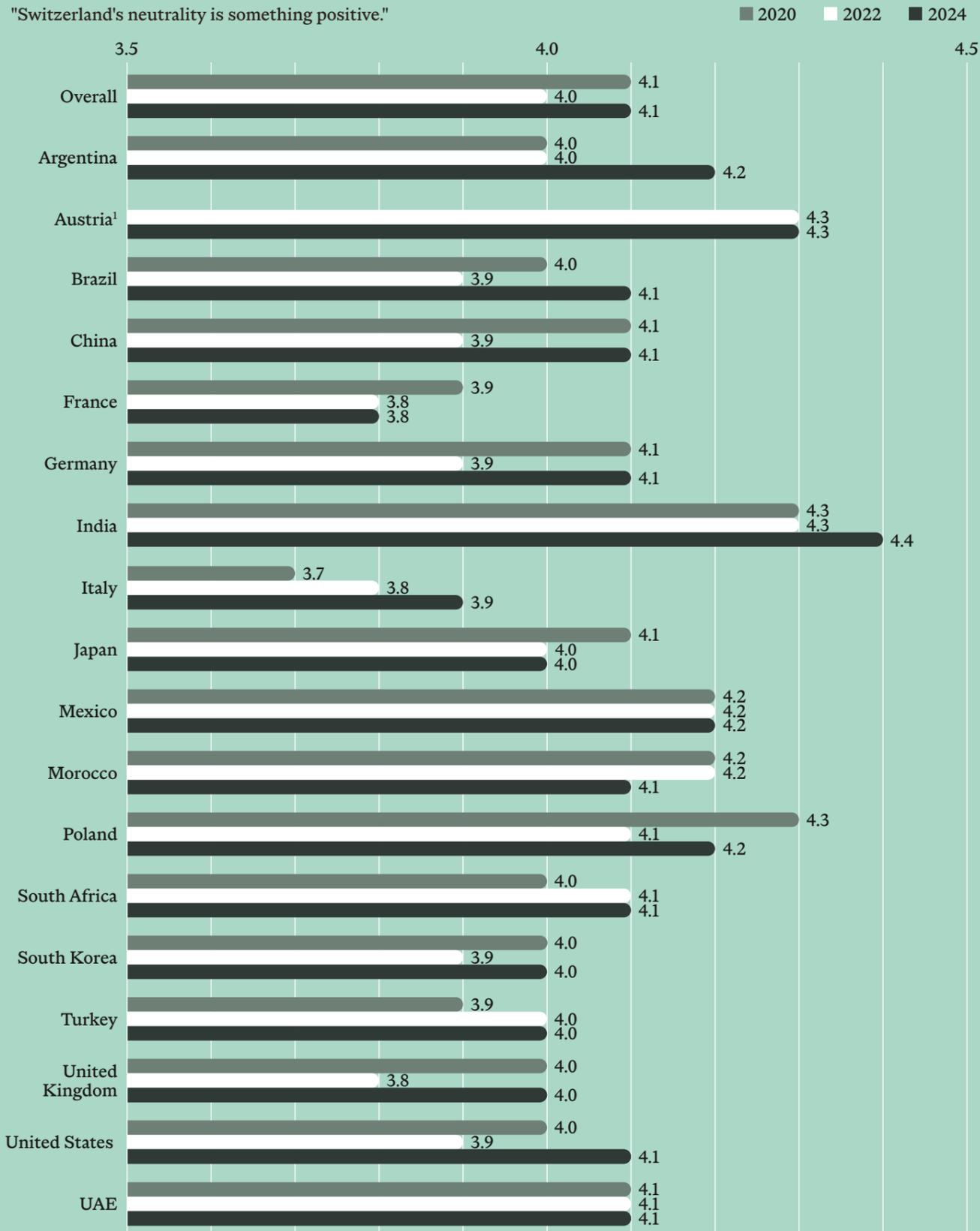
Presence Switzerland's Image Monitor 2024, n = 11'130

The question about **spontaneous associations** with Switzerland often revealed a stereotypical but predominantly positive first impression of the country, with foreign respondents most frequently associating Switzerland with beautiful landscapes, traditional products, prosperity and economic stability (see infographic 3). Many consider the high cost of living and high prices in the country to be its main disadvantages.

The positive overall assessment of Switzerland mirrors previous surveys. The stability of its image is demonstrated, among other things, by the fact that a large majority of all respondents (over 70%) reported that their image of Switzerland had not changed in the last two years. Around 14% of respondents felt that their impression of Switzerland had improved, while only 3.6% said it had worsened. The positive changes were predominant in almost all countries. The reasons cited by respondents for their improved image of Switzerland included its innovative capacity and its good economic situation.

A deterioration in perception was often put down to labour market challenges or perceived social inequality. As recently as the 2022 survey, these issues did not feature among the ten most common reasons for a deterioration in image. As well as high prices, some respondents attributed their worsened perception to Switzerland's stance on the Ukraine war. In this respect, the far-reaching changes to the global peace and security order since 2022 also seem to have had an impact on the country's image. However, the overall picture continues to bear out the long-term stability of a very positive image of Switzerland among the general public abroad.

## Infographic 4 Changes in public perception of Swiss neutrality



Average agreement with the statement (mean value) 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)

<sup>1</sup> no data collected for 2020

Presence Switzerland's Image Monitor 2024, n = 11'130

The perception of Swiss neutrality among the general population abroad has changed markedly in the last two years. It generally has a lower profile than in 2022 and is now rated very positively again, after being viewed much more critically in the immediate aftermath of Russia's attack on Ukraine. The reduced focus on the issue of neutrality is evident in several aspects of the survey. Firstly, the proportion of respondents who spontaneously associate Switzerland with neutrality has fallen slightly compared with the previous survey. Secondly, neutrality is no longer cited quite as often as a weakness of Switzerland compared with 2022, although still significantly more so than before the Russian attack on Ukraine. In addition, some two years after the outbreak of the war, respondents still remember news reports relating to Switzerland's actions in the context of the war relatively frequently. However, Switzerland's neutrality is also much less of a focus in this regard than it was in 2022.

Finally, Swiss neutrality is also viewed less critically by people abroad than it was two years ago. Infographic 4 illustrates how their views have changed since 2020. After the Russian attack on Ukraine in early 2022, support for the statement that Switzerland's neutrality is something positive fell significantly in many countries. However, in most countries this figure has now returned to similarly high levels to those seen before the Russian attack began. The most significant improvement in perception in this respect can be seen in China, the US, Brazil and Poland. More respondents than in the 2022 survey also believed that Switzerland's neutrality allows it to mediate in conflicts and provide its good offices internationally. This was particularly evident in China, Turkey, the US and Poland.

Even after the UBS takeover of Credit Suisse around two years ago, the **Swiss financial centre continues to enjoy a good reputation** among the general public abroad, with over two thirds of respondents rating the quality of Swiss banks and financial institutions as high to very high. Moreover, the Swiss financial centre continues to score significantly better than its counterparts in Germany, the UK, the US and Singapore in all 18 countries surveyed. Contrary to common stereotypes, the Swiss financial centre also receives good ratings for ethical integrity: in most countries, the majority of respondents believe that Swiss banks and financial institutions act ethically and responsibly.

Despite global coverage of the takeover of Credit Suisse, the spontaneous associations also found that respondents did not connect Switzerland more strongly with the banking sector than in 2022. As in previous years, news relating to the Swiss banking and financial centre was frequently recalled, but here too there was no increase compared with 2022. Finally, slightly more people than in the previous survey agreed that Switzerland was stepping up its efforts to combat tax evasion. However, this figure has remained relatively stable over time. Overall, perceptions of the Swiss financial centre have changed only slightly since the last two surveys.

**Relations between Switzerland and the EU** received relatively little coverage in the foreign media in 2024, with the majority of reporting coming from neighbouring countries. However, the public abroad is relatively critical of Switzerland's role in Europe compared with other issues. This is apparent from specific questions about perceptions of Switzerland that were put only to respondents in European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and the UK). In principle, relations between Switzerland and the EU are perceived as solid, although the respondents are uncertain about their future development. However, a large proportion of all respondents believe that Switzerland should move closer to the EU politically.

Among the European population, Switzerland is still sometimes seen as a 'cherry picker'. A majority of respondents believe that Switzerland gets a lot out of the EU without putting very much in. At the same time, respondents in most countries feel that Switzerland makes only a small contribution to Europe: only around a third of respondents believe that Switzerland proactively contributes to the positive shaping of relations between Switzerland and the EU, although

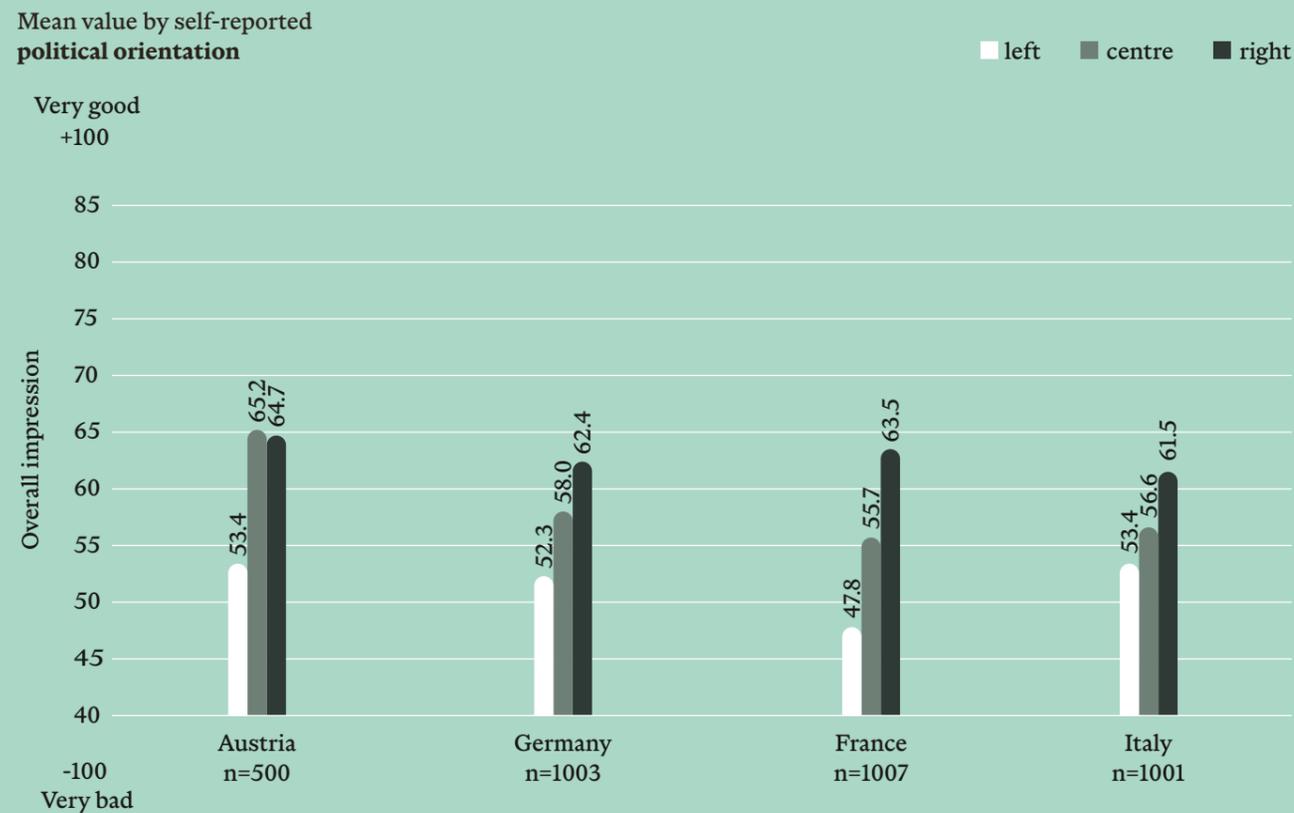
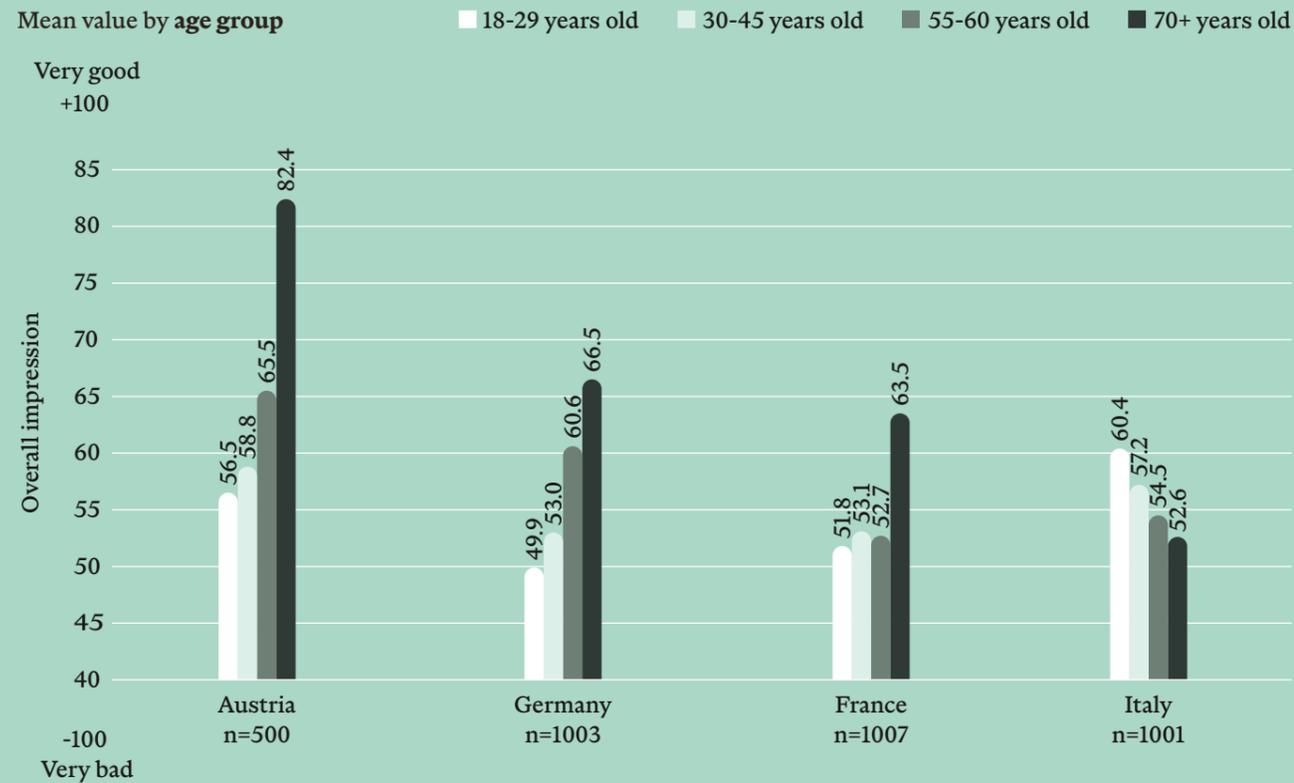
this figure has improved slightly compared with 2022. On average, only just under a third of respondents believe that Switzerland makes a significant contribution to prosperity in the EU, and this proportion is even lower in neighbouring countries.

Switzerland's contribution to reducing economic and social inequalities is also viewed relatively critically – and here too, agreement with the statement is significantly lower in neighbouring countries than in Poland and the UK. However, a comparison with various benchmark countries shows that France, Poland, the Netherlands and Germany also receive relatively low approval ratings in this regard. Switzerland is therefore not alone in this sceptical appraisal of its role in Europe.

**Switzerland is often judged more critically by its neighbours than by other countries**, not only with regard to its commitment in Europe, but also beyond – for example when it comes to the ethical conduct of Swiss companies and financial institutions or the openness and welcoming culture in Switzerland. Agreement with the statements that Switzerland is a tolerant and open country and welcomes foreigners is significantly lower in neighbouring countries compared with the global average. A similar response pattern can be seen with regard to the friendliness of the Swiss, a subject on which respondents in Italy take a particularly critical view.

Overall, the **most nuanced image of Switzerland is to be found in neighbouring countries**. The further away they are geographically and culturally, the more respondents fall back on common stereotypes. However, a closer look also highlights revealing differences between neighbouring countries. For example, Switzerland is often associated with high prices in Germany and Austria, whereas in Italy and France the prevailing association is with cleanliness. While the other neighbouring countries are significantly below the global average in their rating of the overall impression of Switzerland, people in Austria have an above-average overall image of our country. Older, middle-class Austrians with moderate to more right-wing political views rate Switzerland particularly positively. A similar picture emerges for these population groups in France and Germany, albeit at a lower level. Conversely, in Italy, it is primarily younger and wealthier people who have a very favourable impression of Switzerland. It is also striking that the older the respondents in Italy are, the more critical they are of Switzer-

## Infographic 5 Overall impression of Switzerland in neighbouring countries by population segment



land (see infographic 5). Generally, therefore, a country's geographical and cultural proximity, with the in-depth knowledge of current sociopolitical developments that this entails, translates into a more nuanced and often more critical perception of Switzerland. At the same time, differences within the neighbouring countries show that country-specific historical experiences and characteristics probably also shape Switzerland's image among people abroad.

### Presence Switzerland's Image Monitor

Presence Switzerland's Image Monitor captures the image of Switzerland among the general population abroad. The results are based on a representative population survey designed by Presence Switzerland and involving a total of 11,130 people in 18 countries worldwide. The survey was conducted between 15 January and 9 February 2024. The following countries were included in the latest survey: Argentina, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, it has no longer been possible to carry out a survey in Russia. The Image Monitor has been conducted every two years since 2016 and is designed as a time series study. The aim of the study is to identify developments and trends in how Switzerland is perceived. The findings of the survey are published on the Presence Switzerland website.

# Switzerland's image abroad in 2024

The present analysis shows that 2024 was a good year for Switzerland's image abroad. Switzerland's image is very positive. This is all the more striking given the situation in 2022 and 2023. The sometimes sensitive reputational developments in those years, specifically the occasionally significant media criticism of Switzerland abroad on some issues and in some locations, particularly in connection with its stance on the war in Ukraine and against the backdrop of the demise of Credit Suisse, eased markedly in 2024. Switzerland is also rated highly or even very highly in many areas by the general public abroad. Temporary declines in its image abroad on individual issues in previous years have been reversed, meaning that overall a positive assessment can be made of Switzerland's current image.

As far as the analysed international media outlets are concerned, it is striking that overall they reported less intensively and, above all, less critically about Switzerland in 2024 than in the previous two years. This can be seen, for example, in reporting linked to the war in Ukraine. Not only did the frequency and extent of media criticism on this topic decrease, but by organising the Summit on Peace in Ukraine, Switzerland received relatively substantial attention in the foreign media, most of it factual or positive. Although Switzerland was understandably not the focus of interest, it was regularly mentioned as the event's organiser and often praised – with the explicit exception of the Russian media. Switzerland's good offices also received greater visibility among a wide audience in connection with the Bürgenstock summit, having rarely made the headlines since the 2021 Biden–Putin summit in Geneva. The developments outlined here are also likely to explain the equally striking fact that the public in many coun-

tries perceived Swiss neutrality more positively again in 2024 than in 2022, when there had been a significant deterioration in many places against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

The demise of Credit Suisse and its takeover by UBS in 2023 generated a historically high volume of media coverage and a very critical media response abroad, particularly towards the bank. Here too, there were signs of an easing in 2024. Although the international media continued to report on the impact and handling of these events, for example in connection with the publication of the PInC report in late 2024, media interest in the issue fell back to average levels. Moreover, the results of the Image Monitor 2024 showed that the Swiss financial centre continued to enjoy a very good reputation among the public abroad, despite these upheavals.

For much of the time, relations between Switzerland and the EU were barely covered in the foreign media. Only the announcement of the conclusion of the negotiations in late 2024 elicited a moderate response, especially in Switzerland's neighbouring countries, although nothing compared with the attention it received in the Swiss media. While the foreign media mostly reported on the outcome of the negotiations in a factual or positive tone, interest abroad was limited, with reference also being made to the many obstacles involved in the ratification process in Switzerland and the anticipated popular vote. Presumably, the domestic political debates in Switzerland on this issue will attract wider interest, particularly in European countries, which should also influence the public's perception. Overall, as in previous years, the general population took a rather critical view – compared with other issues – of Switzerland's role in Europe, for example its contribution to reducing economic and social inequalities.

Two other Switzerland-related events in 2024 merit a mention, having attracted above-average media attention in this relatively quiet year: the ECHR ruling against Switzerland in the Climate Seniors case and Nemo's victory at the Eurovision Song Contest. In both cases, most reports did not centre on Switzerland itself. It was more the precedent-setting nature of the ECHR ruling and Nemo's performance and personality that attracted attention.

As previously noted, Switzerland is rated positively by the public abroad, in terms of both overall perception and many individual aspects such as location-specific

advantages and the financial centre. The rule of thumb that countries' images are generally relatively robust, especially among the general population, and usually change only slowly, has been borne out once again, with 70% of the over 11,000 respondents stating that their image of Switzerland had not changed in the past two years. Another positive aspect is that an overwhelming majority of those who reported a change of perception said that their image of Switzerland had improved. The aforementioned easing on the issue of neutrality and the continued positive perception of the financial centre despite the events of 2023 suggest that a fundamentally good and firmly embedded image of a country acts as a buffer, helping it to overcome reputationally difficult events and periods and return quickly to an essentially positive perception. It is also worth noting that perceptions of Switzerland in neighbouring countries are somewhat more nuanced and sometimes more critical than in countries further away, where they are generally based more on stereotypes or clichés.

There are two categories of topics that have had a particular impact on perceptions of Switzerland abroad in recent years. The first of these are the specifically Swiss events and developments which, because of their intrinsic significance, aroused particular interest abroad. Secondly, certain international developments and thematic trends also determined which Swiss positions, characteristics and behaviours the outside world focused on most, and what received particular attention abroad. As in previous years, the focus in 2024 was primarily on political and economic issues. This trend is expected to persist, with international developments continuing to have an impact on perceptions of Switzerland abroad.

