

lesobservateurs.ch

A nationalist Swiss website that frequently publishes false content and unproven conspiracy theories, including about the COVID-19 pandemic.



Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 12.5/100

Ownership and Financing

LesObservateurs.ch is owned by WindischMediaProd SA, a media company based in Crans-Montana, Switzerland. According to the Registries of Commerce of Switzerland, the president of WindischMediaProd SA is Uli Windisch, the founder of LesObservateurs.ch. Windisch is also an author of political and social sciences books and an honorary professor of sociology at the University of Geneva.

The site derives revenue from advertising and donations.

Content

Les Observateurs (which means “The Observers” in French) describes itself as “a vision of Swiss news free from groupthink,” according to its Who We Are page. (“Une vision de l’actualité suisse libérée de la pensée unique”).

The site publishes content that generally promotes far-right and populist points of view, including stories that portray Islam and immigration as threats to society. Most of the website’s stories are republished from other news organizations and other French-language sites that share some of its far-right views, such as FdeSouche.com and Dreuz.info. Les Observateurs also features articles written by members of the Swiss People's Party, a national-conservative political party.

Typical headlines include “COVID-19: Some patients believed to be cured test positive again” (“Covid-19 : certains patients qu’on croyait guéris sont de nouveau testés positifs”); “Erdogan threatens to let out 3.7 million migrants in Europe” (“Erdogan menace de faire déferler 3,7 millions de migrants sur l’Europe”); “Faced with the coronavirus, the State is not our friend” (“Face au Coronavirus, l’État n’est pas notre ami”); and “Berlin:

-  Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
-  Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
-  Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
-  Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
-  Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
-  Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
-  Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
-  Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
-  The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

Salafist Muslims abused coronavirus emergency aid”
 (“Berlin : Des musulmans salafistes ont abusé de l’aide
 d’urgence dédiée au coronavirus”).

Credibility

Many articles on LesObservateurs.ch are republished, with attribution, from far-right news sites such as RiposteLaique.com and BVoltaire.fr, which NewsGuard has found to repeatedly publish false content. LesObservateurs.ch has regularly shared false claims found on these sites, including conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, in April 2020, the site posted a YouTube video titled “1st Documentary Movie on the Origin of CCP Virus, Tracking Down the Origin of the Wuhan Coronavirus,” which originally appeared on the Epoch Times, an anti-Chinese government news site. The video claimed that SARS-CoV-2 may be a bioengineered virus released from a virology institute in Wuhan, China. It claimed, without evidence, that French security suspected that “the Chinese regime was conducting biochemical weapons experiments” at the P4 laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus was engineered as a bioweapon. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” An earlier study, published in February 2020 in the journal Nature, found that the COVID-19 virus is “96% percent identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus.”

In an April 2020 statement published on its website, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said “The Intelligence Community (IC) also concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.”

Another April 2020 story, which was originally published on RiposteLaique.com, claimed that Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates has proposed a forced immunization program that would involve implanting vaccinated people with microchips, in association with China and what the article referred to as the “globalist Church.”

The article said, "His [Gates'] program is simple and can be summed up in a few words: forcibly vaccinate all the people on the planet and implant them with RFID chips or other markers permitted by technological progress," ("Son programme est simple et se résume en quelques mots: vacciner de force tous les habitants de la planète et leur implanter des puces RFID ou d'autres marqueurs que l'évolution technologique permettra.")

The article distorted a comment Gates made about the pandemic during an online discussion on the message board Reddit. In response to a question about how businesses should operate during the pandemic, Gates said, "Eventually we will have some digital certificates to show who has recovered or been tested recently or when we have a vaccine who has received it."

However, Gates did not say that digital certificates would involve implantable microchips. The Gates Foundation told Reuters that Gates' reference to "digital certificates" relates to efforts to create a digital platform "with the goal of expanding access to safe, home-based testing."

The article does not provide evidence for its claim about forced vaccinations. In December 2019, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with funding from Gates' philanthropic foundation, did publish a paper about developing technology that can keep a vaccination record on a patient's skin with an ink-like injection that could be read by smartphone. However, that research is unrelated to COVID-19, the study's lead researcher, Kevin McHugh, told FactCheck.org.

When asked about the site's coronavirus coverage cited above, Windisch, the website's founder and editor in chief, told NewsGuard in a telephone interview, "There's no false information. There are sometimes headlines with alarmist wording and in the article, you see that the article is much more complex."

On Jan. 10, 2020, the site republished an article excerpt by French news site WikiStrike.com, titled "The passenger list of the Ukrainian plane could show that he was deliberately shot down (subject to

confirmation),” which made the unsubstantiated claim that Iran deliberately shot down a Ukraine International Airlines plane shortly after it took off from Tehran.

“The list of passengers on board can enlighten us,” the article said of the passenger list for Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, which crashed on Jan. 8, 2020. “By reading their profiles online, we come to the conclusion that the plane was deliberately shot down by Iran.”

LesObservateurs.ch’s article did not provide any factual evidence to back its claim. Iran’s government acknowledged three days after the plane crash that its military unintentionally shot down the plane because of “human error.”

Asked to comment about the article, Windisch said, “We note different theories. We may never know the real one. ”

Another January 2020 article, headlined “White boy kicked on the ground by 12 black and Arab boys” (“Petit blanc frappé au sol par 12 petits noirs et arabes”) inaccurately described a video that first appeared on an anonymous Twitter account, which showed a group of teenagers who appeared to be jumping and kicking a young man lying on the ground. The website said that the video showed “a white boy of about 12 years old kicked on the ground by a dozen black and Arab boys.” The post included a video featuring the founder of RiposteLaique.com, Pierre Cassen, saying, “Do you know why they lynched him, 12 against one? I’m sure the white boy had made racist comments.” (“Vous savez pourquoi ils l’ont lynchée à 12 contre un? Je suis sûr que le petit blanc il avait tenu des propos racistes.”)

The video, which was widely shared on social media, was shot in January 2020 near the Jean-Etienne Guettard school in Etampes, southwest of Paris. A witness told Libération’s fact-checking team CheckNews that the video showed students from a school in Etampes, southwest of France, who were horsing around after a ball game, contrary to the article’s claims that a white boy was the victim of a racist attack. “They are all friends. It wasn’t a fight but

friends who were fighting for laughs after a game,” the witness told CheckNews. (“Ils sont tous copains. Ce n’était pas une bagarre mais des amis qui se battaient pour rigoler après un jeu.”)

The witness’ statement to CheckNews was confirmed by the Versailles Board of Education and the student lying on the ground in the video, according to CheckNews and Franceinfo.

Because LesObservateurs.ch has promoted unsubstantiated conspiracy theories and misinformation, NewsGuard has determined that the site repeatedly publishes false content, does not gather and present information responsibly, and fails to avoid deceptive headlines.

LesObservateurs.ch does not publish a corrections policy, and NewsGuard could not find corrections on the site.

When asked about the site’s corrections policy, the website’s editor in chief, Windisch, told NewsGuard, “There’s no fake news with us. There are no mistakes.”

The site’s Support Us page invites readers to “support LesObservateurs.ch, which fights against groupthink and ideological conformism.” However, its stories frequently express nationalist and populist perspectives, which are not disclosed on the Support Us page.

Most of the website’s content, which appears in a section called “Newsflash” (“Brèves”), includes articles that express nationalist and populist opinions.

For example, a January 2020 article excerpt from RiposteLaique.com, began, “Islam creates ideological, societal and social tumors and metastases that spread in our public space, undermine and destroy it little by little.” (“L’islam crée des tumeurs et des métastases idéologiques, sociétales et sociales qui se répandent dans notre espace public, le minent et le détruisent petit à petit.”)

In February 2020, the site republished an excerpt of an article from far-right site Breizh-info.com, titled “Immigration: French suicide” (“Immigration : le suicide français,”) which said that official immigration numbers show “always more immigration, always more wild spending and as always no political will to get out of this deadly pattern for France.” (“...toujours plus d’immigration, toujours plus de dépenses folles et toujours aucune volonté politique de sortir de ce schéma mortel pour la France.”)

In February 2020, the website republished an article from the official site of the Swiss People’s Party in its “Newsflashes” section, which encouraged readers to vote in favor of a People’s Party initiative that would limit immigration into Switzerland. “We can, on May 17, put an end to this excessiveness by saying a clear and frank YES to the restriction initiative and by finally reducing immigration to an acceptable level for Switzerland,” the article said. “Help us become masters in our own country. Let’s vote YES!” (“Nous pouvons, le 17 mai, mettre fin à cette démesure en disant un OUI clair et franc à l’initiative de limitation et en réduisant enfin l’immigration à un niveau acceptable pour la Suisse... “Aidez-nous donc à redevenir maîtres dans notre propre pays. Votons OUI !”)

Because LesObservateurs.ch regularly publishes opinion in news articles, from an undisclosed political perspective, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

When asked about the site’s political point of view, Windisch said “You have it on the site.” He explained that he believed the statement about fighting “groupthink and ideological conformism” was sufficient disclosure of the website’s perspective.

Transparency

The Support Us page of LesObservateurs.ch invites readers to donate to WindischMediaProd SA. However, it does not explicitly disclose that WindischMediaProd owns the site. Windisch told NewsGuard that the name

of the company appeared on the Support Us page, but did not explain why the site does not clearly disclose its ownership.

The Legal Notice page states that Windisch is the editor in chief of the site and lists his mailing address.

The site features an online contact form, which displayed an error message when NewsGuard tried to use it to contact the site.

Articles that are republished from other sites credit the news organization, but not the article's author. While some original articles are attributed to Windisch, many others are only attributed to the "editorial staff" (Rédaction). The site does not publish a staff directory with biographical or contact information about its content creators.

Windisch did not respond to questions about why the site does not disclose information about its content creators or publish a staff directory.

Advertising is distinguishable from editorial content.

History

Windisch launched the site in 2012. He received initial funding of 450,000 Swiss francs from 10 shareholders, including Swiss investor Tito Tettamanti, according to Swiss TV station RTS.

Written by: [Sophia Tewa](#)

Edited by: [Amy Westfeldt](#), [Chine Labbe](#), [Yves Clarisse](#)

Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

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