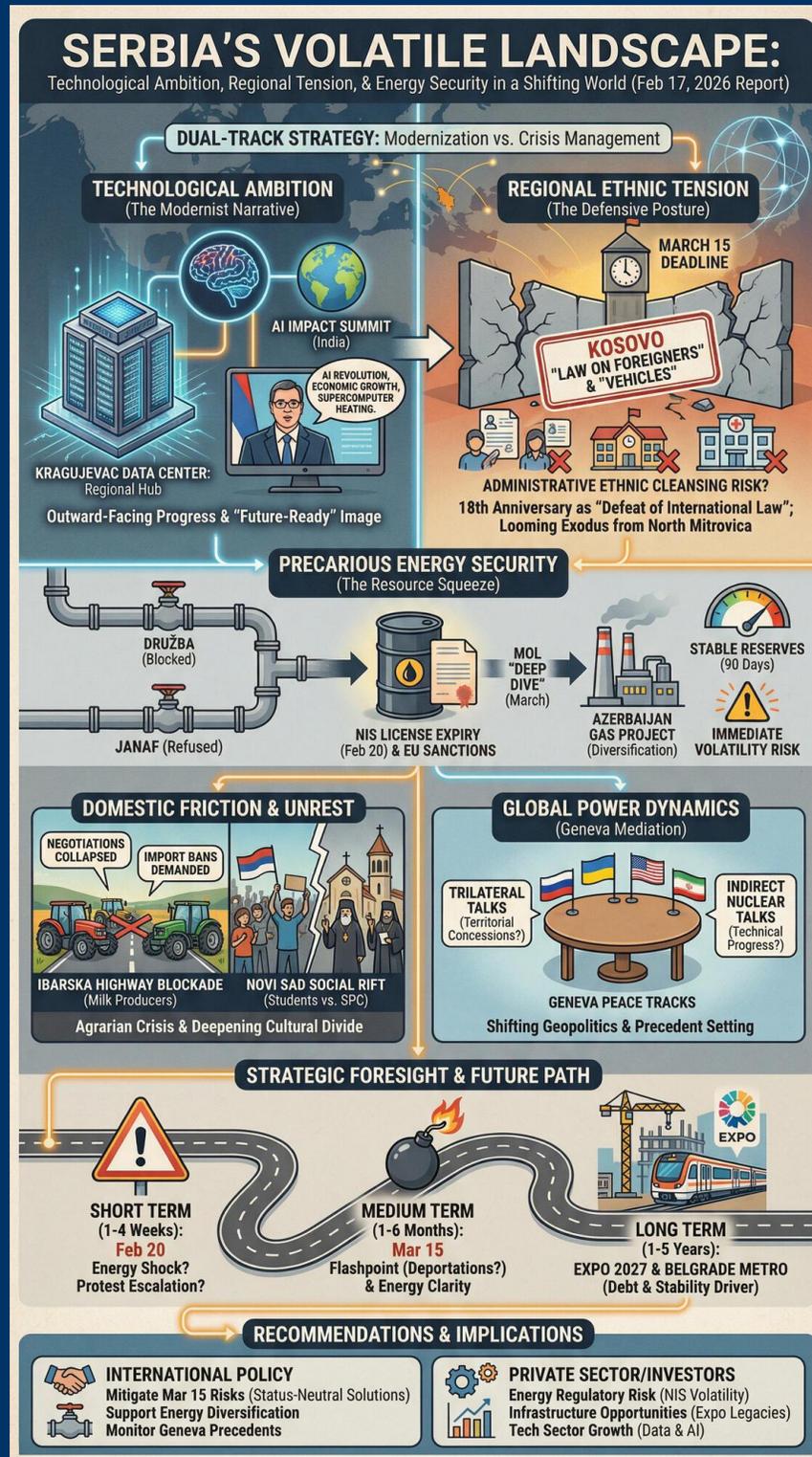


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

RTS1

FEBRUARY 17, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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SERBIA NAVIGATES A VOLATILE
LANDSCAPE OF TECHNOLOGICAL
AMBITION, REGIONAL ETHNIC
TENSION, AND PRECARIOUS
ENERGY SECURITY AMID SHIFTING
GLOBAL POWER DYNAMICS.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

On February 17, 2026, the Serbian administration projected a dual-track strategy of long-term modernization and immediate crisis management. President Aleksandar Vučić used his visit to the AI Impact Summit in India to position Serbia as a regional technological hub, highlighting state-of-the-art data centers in Kragujevac as foundational to future economic growth. This outward-facing narrative of progress is juxtaposed against a defensive domestic posture regarding the 18th anniversary of Kosovo's independence. Serbian officials and analysts characterized the anniversary as a "defeat of international law," focus-

ing heavily on a looming March 15 deadline for the "repressive" application of laws on foreigners and vehicles by Priština, which Belgrade claims is a tool for administrative ethnic cleansing. The day was further defined by significant geopolitical mediation and domestic friction. In Geneva, high-level trilateral talks between Russia, Ukraine, and the United States (led by Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner) coincided with indirect nuclear negotiations between Iran and the U.S. Domestically, the government faced a breakdown in negotiations with milk producers, who have blocked the Ibarska Highway for seven days, and a deepening social rift in Novi Sad following a violent confrontation between student protesters and Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) dignitaries. These events, combined with a precarious energy situation involving the pending expiration of the NIS (Naftna Industrija Srbije) operating license and oil transit disputes in the EU, reveal a state balancing high-tech aspirations with the fragile realities of regional stability and resource dependency.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Presidential AI Mission to India:** President Vučić arrived in New Delhi for the AI Impact Summit, framing Serbia's inclusion in the "AI revolution" as vital for national survival and economic growth. He emphasized that Serbia's data center infrastructure in Kragujevac is superior to any in Southeast Europe and noted that future supercomputers would even be used to provide heating for the city ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Kosovo Legal Deadline and Ethnic Tension:** Serbian officials and scholars raised alarms over the March 15 deadline for the implementation of Priština's Law on Foreigners and Law on Vehicles. Analysts warned this will label 210,000 displaced Serbs and thousands of current residents as "foreigners," potentially forcing the exodus of 7,000-8,000 people from North Mitrovica alone within three days of enforcement ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Geneva Diplomacy (Ukraine and Iran):** Two major peace tracks opened in Geneva. Trilateral talks between Russia (Medinsky), Ukraine (Budanov), and the U.S. focused on territorial concessions under pressure from President Trump. Simultaneously, indirect nuclear talks between Iran and the U.S. (mediated by Oman) showed "technical progress," despite continued military posturing in the Persian Gulf ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Energy Security and NIS Sanctions:** Minister Dubravka Đedović Handanović confirmed that the NIS operating license expires on Friday, Feb 20. Serbia is awaiting a decision from the U.S. administration on a license extension while Hungary's Mol proceeds with a "deep dive" analysis to potentially buy out Gazprom Neft's stake by March ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Novi Sad Social Conflict:** A bicentennial celebration for Matica Srpska was marred by clashes between "blockader" students and citizens. Protesters heckled SPC dignitaries, including Patriarch Porfirije and Metropolitan Joanikije, leading to a fierce condemnation from Assembly President Ana Brnabić, who called the events an "attack on the pillars of the state" ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Agricultural Crisis Escalation:** Negotiations between the Ministry of Agriculture and protesting dairy farmers collapsed after only 90 minutes. Farmers continue to block the Ibarska Highway at Mrčajevci, demanding import bans and market regulation, which the government refuses, citing international trade obligations ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Geopolitics and Regional Stability

The 18th anniversary of Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence remains the primary regional friction point. Belgrade has moved from purely political rhetoric to legalistic warnings, focusing on the "Law on Foreigners" as a mechanism for "nasilna integracija" (forced integration). The framing suggests that any Serbian institution (health or education) not registered in the Priština system by mid-March will be deemed illegal, leading to the potential arrest of staff for "quackery" or illegal medical practice ([Source](#), [Source](#)). **Energy Security** Serbia is caught in a squeeze between EU sanctions on Russian oil and its own inter-

nal market needs. While diesel and gasoline reserves are stable (90 days), the blockade of the Družba pipeline by Ukraine and Croatia's refusal to transport Russian oil via the Jadranski (JANAF) pipeline have forced Serbia to rely more on the Azerbaijan gas power plant project (500 MW) to diversify its base energy source ([Source](#), [Source](#)). **Critical Infrastructure and AI** The governance narrative heavily emphasizes "Expo 2027" and the Belgrade Metro as transformative projects. City Manager Miroslav Čučković detailed the arrival of "Krtica" (tunnel boring machines) and the planned construction of 29 objects across Serbia that will serve as schools and kindergartens after the Expo. The Kragujevac Data Center is being touted as a "state-of-the-art" achievement that justifies high government spending on technology ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)). **Domestic Stability and Civil Unrest** Internal stability is challenged by two distinct groups: agrarian workers and urban student activists. The dairy farmers' protest is entering a critical phase as the government admits it cannot meet the demand for an import ban without triggering EU retaliatory measures. Meanwhile, the Novi Sad incident represents a deepening cultural divide, with the administration framing student protesters as anti-Serbian rather

than anti-government ([Source](#), [Source](#)). **Legislation**

- **Law on Foreigners (Kosovo):** Set for strict enforcement March 15; requires residents without local IDs to register or face deportation ([Source](#)).
- **Law on Vehicles (Kosovo):** Regulates registration and plates; part of the March 15 enforcement push ([Source](#)).
- **Draft Regulation on Beneficiated Work Years:** Proposed expansion of professions entitled to early retirement (pensions), specifically for firefighters in the Smederevo steel mill and emergency medical staff ([Source](#)).
- **Amendment to Spa-Climate Recovery:** Extends the recovery period for war veterans from 7 to 10 days ([Source](#)).
- **Law on Higher Education:** Referenced in the context of a new memorandum of understanding between Belgrade and Athens medical faculties to enhance student mobility ([Source](#)).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

The Serbian government is currently navigating complex policy shifts ranging from labor rights (beneficiated status) to international academic cooperation. Most critical, however, are the "foreign" laws being applied in Kosovo which threaten the continuity of Serbian state-funded education and

healthcare. **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Beneficiated Service Years Regulation:** A proposal by the PIO Fund sent to the Ministry of Labor to include more hazardous jobs in early retirement schemes, particularly impacting the metallurgical sector and healthcare ([Source](#)).
- **National Strategy for E-Mobility:** Discussion on the need for legislative standards for battery production and infrastructure to increase electric vehicle adoption from 2% to EU levels ([Source](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Ministry of Agriculture vs. Farmers:** Collapsed press event/meeting regarding milk prices and import quotas ([Source](#)).
- **Belgrade-Athens Medical Agreement:** Signing ceremony for university cooperation attended by PM Macut ([Source](#)).
- **Geneva Press Briefings:** US, Russian, and Iranian officials provided closed-door updates on peace and nuclear talks ([Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The "Administrative" War for Kosovo The narrative has shifted from the threat of military intervention to "administrative ethnic cleansing." By using the Law on Foreigners, Priština is effectively bypassing the need for physical force to remove Serbian influence. If professors and doctors are forced to register as foreigners working for "illegal" (unaccredited) institu-

tions, the entire Serbian social infrastructure in the North collapses. This is described as a "perfect storm" that uses European-style regulations to achieve mono-ethnic goals ([Source](#), [Source](#)). **Technological Sovereignty as a Modernist Distraction** The administration is leaning heavily into "AI" and "Digital Transformation" to counter domestic images of farmers on tractors and students in the streets. President Vučić's emphasis on supercomputers and data centers in India serves to paint Serbia as a "future-ready" nation, attempting to leapfrog traditional regional problems by becoming a digital hub for SE Europe. The claim that the Kragujevac center is "state-of-the-art" is central to this prestige-building ([Source](#)). **The Erosion of "Neutral" Cultural Institutions** The Matica Srpska bicentennial and the subsequent protests against SPC dignitaries show that cultural and religious institutions are no longer seen as unifying "pillars" but as partisan targets. The government's reaction—framing the protests as an attack on "the soul of the nation"—indicates a hardening of the state's use of traditional identity to delegitimize political dissent ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks):

- The February 20 deadline for the NIS operating license will cause immediate volatility in the energy sector if the U.S. does not grant an extension. A lapse would likely trigger a rapid acceleration of the Mol acquisition of Gazprom Neft's shares ([Source](#)).
- The milk producer protests are likely to expand to other regions if the 13:00 meeting failure leads to more highway blockades ([Source](#)).

Medium Term (1-6 Months):

- March 15 will be a flashpoint for regional conflict. If Priština begins deporting Serbian faculty or doctors under the Law on Foreigners, a mass exodus or large-scale civil disobedience in North Mitrovica is highly probable ([Source](#)).
- The completion of the "deep dive" by Mol into NIS will clarify Serbia's energy alignment for the next decade ([Source](#)).

Long Term (1-5 Years):

- Expo 2027 and the Belgrade Metro projects will serve as the primary drivers of domestic debt and construction sector growth. The failure or success of these will determine the long-term stability of the current ruling elite ([Source](#)).
- The AI infrastructure in Kragujevac will either become a legitimate economic engine or a "white elephant" if Serbia fails to attract the global tech giants discussed during the India summit ([Source](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Mitigate March 15 Risks:** Diplomatic pressure should be applied to Priština to create "status-neutral" registration for healthcare and education workers to prevent a humanitarian crisis in North Kosovo ([Source](#)).
- **Energy Diversification:** Support the Azerbaijan-Serbia gas corridor to reduce regional dependence on the contested Družba and JANAf pipelines ([Source](#)).
- **Monitor Geneva Outcomes:** The territorial concessions being debated in Geneva for Ukraine will likely be cited as precedents for the Belgrade-Priština dialogue ([Source](#)).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Energy Regulatory Risk:** NIS remains a high-risk asset until the ownership shift from Gazprom Neft to Mol is finalized and the U.S. license is permanently stabilized ([Source](#)).
- **Infrastructure Opportunities:** Expo 2027 related construction and the decentralization of "Expo legacies" (schools/kindergartens) to 29 Serbian municipalities offer significant procurement opportunities ([Source](#)).
- **Tech Sector Growth:** The Kragujevac Data Center expansion and the supercomputer project suggest a favorable climate for AI-related startups and data-heavy industries in Serbia ([Source](#)).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Media Trends is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend

analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

For questions or suggestions, please contact kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com. You can also learn more about the GDEL T Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.