

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

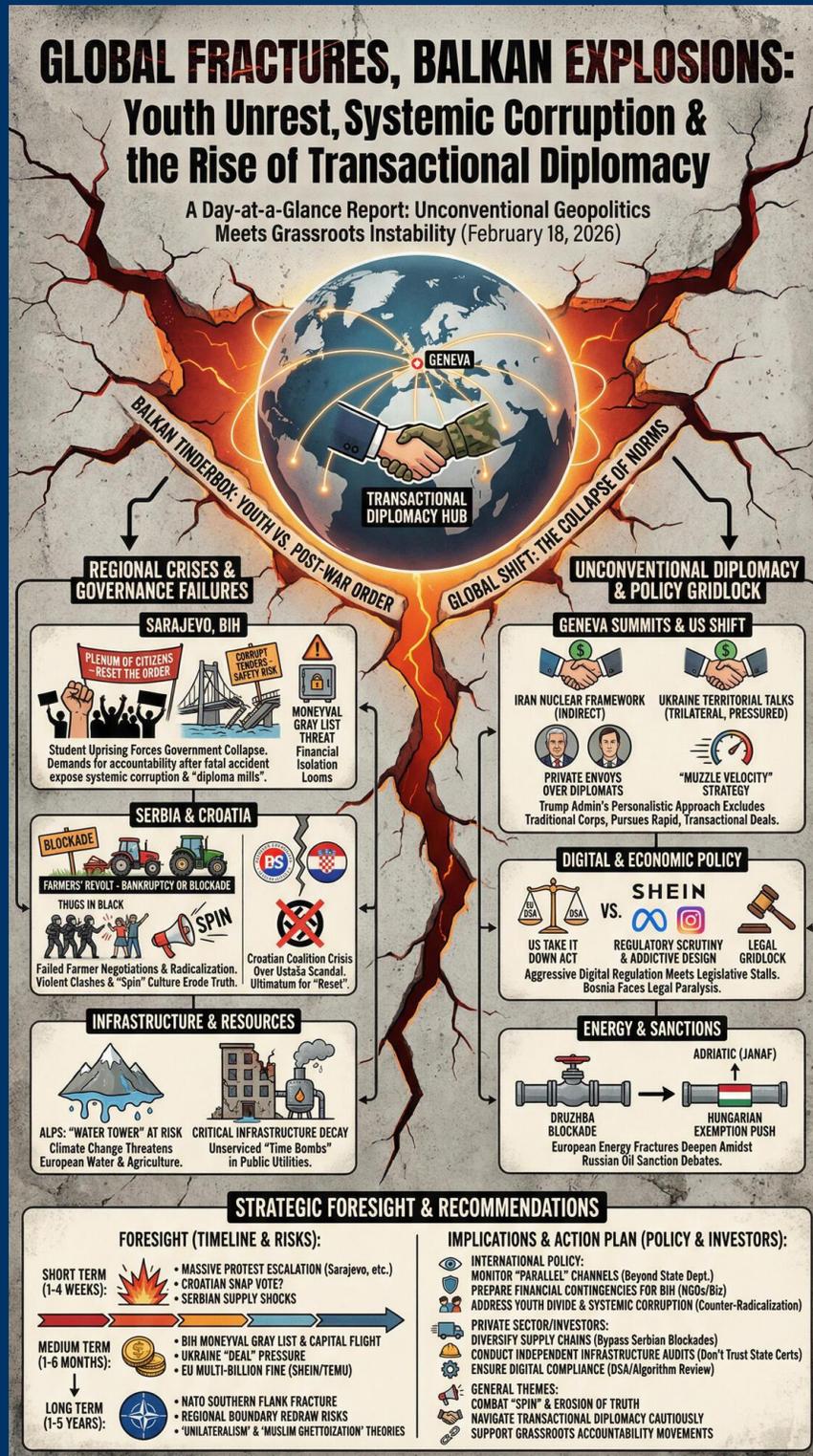
N1BOS

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

GLOBAL FRACTURES, BALKAN EXPLOSIONS: Youth Unrest, Systemic Corruption & the Rise of Transactional Diplomacy

A Day-at-a-Glance Report: Unconventional Geopolitics
Meets Grassroots Instability (February 18, 2026)



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YOUTH-LED SOCIAL UNREST
ESCALATES IN THE BALKANS
AMIDST A VOLATILE GLOBAL SHIFT
TOWARD TRANSACTIONAL
DIPLOMACY

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 18, 2026, was defined by a surge in grassroots instability across the Balkan region, coinciding with high-stakes, unconventional diplomatic negotiations in Geneva. In Sarajevo, the sixth consecutive day of youth-led protests following a fatal tramway accident has effectively paralyzed the local government, forcing the resignation of the Cantonal Premier and the Director of the public transport company (Gras). These protests have evolved from a specific grievance into a broader indictment of systemic corruption and state failure, with students and high schoolers demanding a "reset" of the political order. Simultaneously, in Serbia, failed negotiations between the government and farmers have led to a radicalization of blockades, while violent clashes between state-aligned activists and students in Novi Sad have deepened the domestic divide. The ruling SNS party's attempt to "spin" these incidents suggests a de-

teriorating commitment to civil liberties and democratic norms.

On the international stage, Geneva has become the nexus for a new era of transactional diplomacy. Envoys from the second Trump administration are engaged in trilateral talks with Russia and Ukraine, and indirect negotiations with Iran. While "guiding principles" for a potential nuclear agreement were reportedly reached with Tehran, the exclusion of traditional diplomatic corps in favor of personal business associates like Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner marks a significant departure from historical norms. This shift toward "muzzle velocity"—doing so many things so quickly that opposition cannot find its footing—is creating an atmosphere of "illusion of control" while masking underlying unpopularity and administrative chaos. Regionally, the Balkans remain a menu for larger powers, with the threat of secession in Bosnia and Herzegovina being leveraged as a geopolitical tool by the Kremlin and its local proxies.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Sarajevo Student Uprising Forces Government Collapse:** Thousands of students and citizens occupied Sarajevo's streets for the sixth day, demanding systemic accountability following the death of Erdoan Morankić. Protesters rejected the resignation of Premier Nihad Uk as "pro-forma" and demanded criminal prosecutions and an expert-led government to replace the "corrupt" administration ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Failed Farmer Negotiations in Serbia Lead to Radicalization:** Talks between the Serbian Minister of Agriculture and protesting farmers collapsed after the Minister reportedly insulted participants and questioned their "horoscope signs" during the session. Farmers have announced a total blockade of major traffic arteries, citing impending bankruptcy due to uncontrolled imports ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Geneva Summits on Ukraine and Iran:** US envoys Witkoff and Kushner mediated progress in indirect talks with Iran, agreeing on a framework for the nuclear program. Simultaneously, trilateral talks regarding the fate of Ukrainian territory are under intense pressure from the Trump administration for a "rapid" deal, despite Ukrainian fears of being forced into existential concessions ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Croatian Coalition Crisis Over Ustaša Scandal:** The ruling coalition in Croatia faces potential collapse after another video surfaced of DP (Homeland Movement) official Josip Dabro glorifying fascist leader Ante Pavelić. The HSLS party has issued a 30-day ultimatum to Premier Plenković to "reset" the coalition or lose their support ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Moneyval "Gray List" Threat for Bosnia:** The BH Council of Ministers failed again to adopt crucial anti-money laundering laws, leaving the country on the verge of being blacklisted by international financial monitors, which experts warn will devastate the domestic economy ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Hungarian Push for Russian Oil Sanction Exemptions:** Hungary has officially notified the EU Commission of its intent to seek exemptions for importing Russian crude via the Adriatic Pipeline (JANAF) due to the blockade of the Druzhba pipeline, highlighting ongoing European energy fractures ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

- **Corruption & Governance:** Investigations into the educational credentials of former rector Zana Dolićanin revealed she likely entered medical school without a high school diploma, symbolizing the "diploma mill" culture and systemic nepotism in the region ([Source](#), [Source](#)). In Sarajevo, the "Gras" transport scandal revealed that tenders for safety-critical components were awarded to firms with zero relevant experience ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Civil Unrest:** Police in Belgrade and Novi Sad are accused of using "thugs in black" to attack students and journalists, with high-ranking officials like Ana Brnabić dismissing physical injuries as "media spins" ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Energy Security:** The Alps are losing their status as Europe's "water tower" due to a 2-degree Celsius temperature rise, threatening groundwater replenishment and agricultural output across the continent ([Source](#)).
- **Critical Infrastructure:** Protesters in Sarajevo highlighted that the newly reconstructed tram tracks were being destroyed by mixing incompatible old and new rolling stock, while a "ticking time bomb" boiler in student dorms remains unserviced ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Economic Statecraft:** The Trump administration's use of tariffs and transactional diplomatic threats is reportedly raising prices domestically while failing to achieve long-term strategic stability ([Source](#)).
- **Legislation:**
 - **BIH:** Failure to pass the Law on Courts and the Law on VSTV (High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council) ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
 - **Croatia:** Debate on amendments to the Law on Foreigners regarding labor imports ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
 - **US:** The "Take It Down Act" aimed at removing non-consensual sexual images/deepfakes ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
 - **EU:** Digital Services Act (DSA) formal proceedings against Shein for illegal products and "addictive" design ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

Legislative activity today was characterized by gridlock in Bosnia and Herzegovina and increasing regulatory scrutiny of digital giants in the European Union and the United States. While Bosnia faces financial isolation due to political obstruction, the EU is moving into an aggressive enforcement phase regarding digital trade and consumer protection.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Law on Foreigners (Croatia):** Aimed at liberalizing the labor market to address a shortage of 171,000 workers, but criticized for lacking integration measures and treating humans as "imported goods" ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Law on Institutions (BIH):** Proposed amendments to the labor laws for state-level employees ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Digital Services Act (EU):** Formal proceedings against Shein for algorithm transparency and illegal product sales ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Anti-Money Laundering Package (BIH):** Urgent legislation required to avoid the Moneyval gray list, currently stalled by SNSD delegates ([Source](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **SDA Press Conference (Sarajevo):** The opposition party claimed the current "Troika" government has overseen an "explosion of corruption" and stated they would not participate in "improvised solutions" to the government crisis ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Meta/Instagram Hearing (Los Angeles):** Mark Zuckerberg and Adam Mosseri faced intense questioning regarding social media's "addictive" design and its link to teen suicides ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **EP Council Briefing:** Discussion on the impact of the "muzzle velocity" policy of the second Trump administration ([Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

1. The Collapse of Traditional Diplomatic Gatekeeping

A recurring theme is the displacement of career diplomats by personal envoys in the US administration. Analysts note that Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff are attempting to "žonglirati" (juggle) three major geopolitical crises—Ukraine, Gaza, and Iran—simultaneously without traditional policy processes. This "transactionalism" is described by historians as behaving "very much like Russians," where the state is captured for private or highly ideological interests. This has led to a

"morally disturbing" prospect where foreign policy is conducted outside the interest of national allies or world peace ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

2. The "Plenary" Awakening: Youth vs. the Post-War Order

In Sarajevo, the "Plenum of Citizens" has reappeared as a concept for the first time since 2014. The youth are explicitly rejecting the "trauma-based manipulation" used by post-war leaders for 30 years. They are no longer moved by ethno-nationalist fear-mongering, focusing instead on "human security"—safe transport, uncorrupted education, and functional utilities. This represents a significant demographic shift where the "post-war generation" is finally challenging the "war-time elites" ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

3. The Weaponization of "Spin" and the Erosion of Truth

In both Serbia and Croatia, governments are increasingly relying on blatant denials of documented evidence. In Serbia, physical assaults on students are labeled "spins" by the Speaker of the Parliament, while in Croatia, fascist chants are dismissed as "carnival jokes." This "relativization" of extremism and violence is seen as a deliberate strategy to maintain power through the polarization of the media landscape ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect massive protest escalation in Sarajevo on Saturday, February 21, with potential solidarity actions in Tuzla and Mostar. The Croatian government faces a high risk of a "snap" vote of no confidence if Plenković fails to discipline the Homeland Movement (DP). In Serbia, the

farmer blockades will likely cause significant logistics disruptions and food supply chain shocks ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The Trump administration will likely attempt to force a "referendum" or "territorial exchange" in Ukraine to fulfill "deal-making" promises before the US mid-term elections. Bosnia and Herzegovina will likely enter the Moneyval "gray list," leading to increased transaction costs and a flight of foreign capital. The EU will likely issue its first multi-billion euro fine under the DSA against a Chinese platform (Shein/Temu) ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Long Term (1-5 Years): The move toward "unilateralism" in Washington could lead to the structural fracturing of NATO's southern flank if US-Russian "pacts" are prioritized over regional sovereignty. The Balkans may see a fundamental redraw of internal boundaries if "Muslim gettoization" theories favored by some regional lobbyists gain traction in a transactional White House ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Monitor "Parallel" Channels:** Diplomatic missions must look beyond the US State Department to informal business networks (Witkoff/Kushner) to understand the actual trajectory of US policy in the Balkans and Iran ([Source](#)).
- **Prepare for Financial Isolation of BIH:** EU partners should develop contingency mechanisms for NGOs and legitimate businesses if BIH is "gray-listed" by Moneyval ([Source](#)).

- **Address the Youth Divide:** Counter-radicalization efforts in the Balkans must move beyond elite politics to address the systemic corruption that is driving both democratic uprising and fascist nostalgia among different youth cohorts ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Contingencies:** Serbian logistics remain high-risk due to radicalized farmer blockades; diversify transit routes through Bulgaria or Romania ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Infrastructure Diligence:** Investors in Balkan municipal projects (transport, energy) must conduct independent engineering audits, as state-issued "safety certificates" are currently compromised by procurement scandals ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Regulatory Compliance (Digital):** E-commerce entities must urgently review algorithm designs and vendor origins to comply with the EU's newly enforced DSA standards or risk catastrophic fines ([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 GDELT Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.