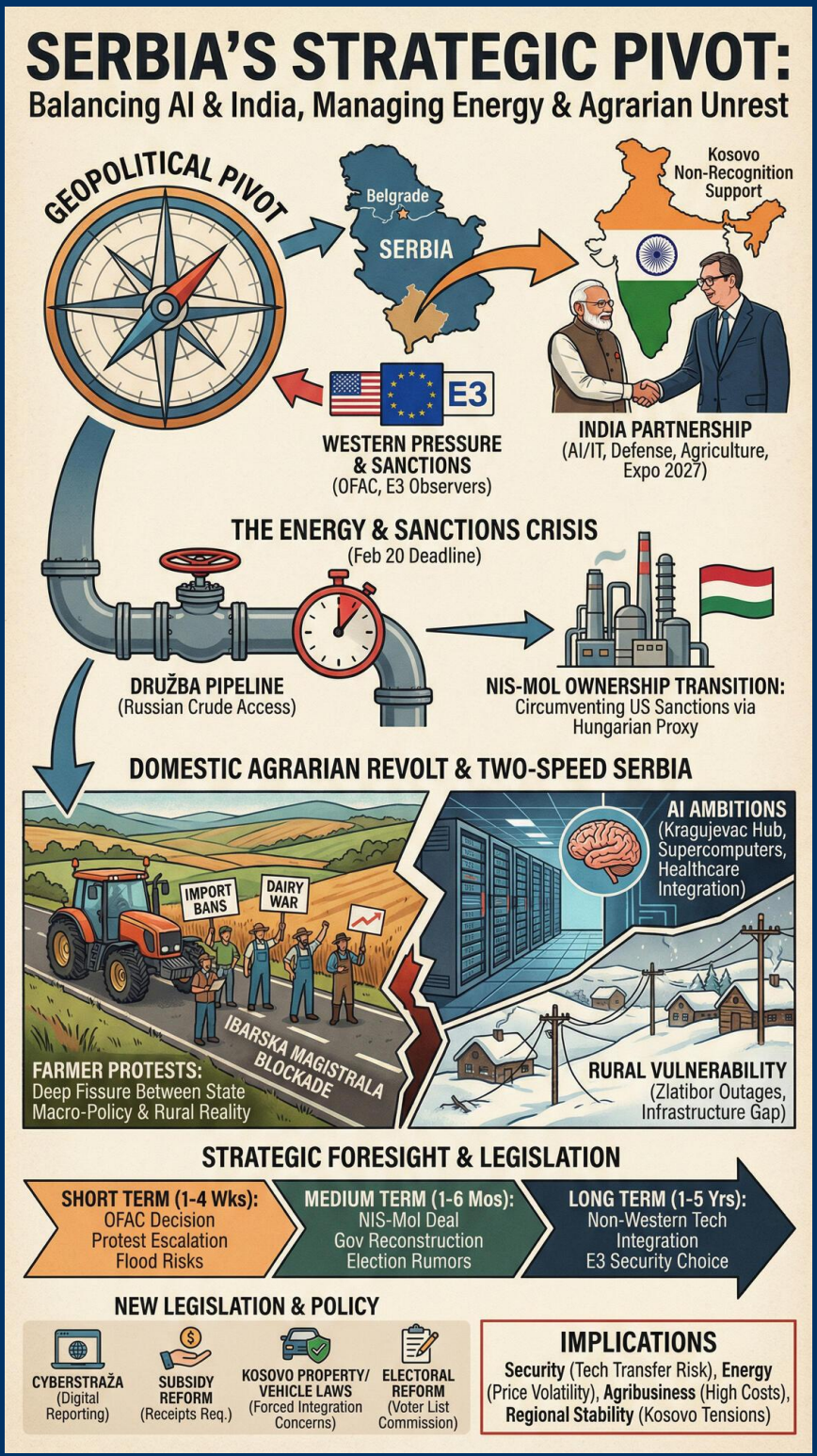
TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

RTS1

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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SERBIA NAVIGATES A STRATEGIC PIVOT TO INDIA AND AI AMIDST EXPIRING ENERGY LICENSES AND ESCALATING DOMESTIC AGRARIAN UNREST

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 18, 2026, marks a critical junction for Serbian governance, characterized by an aggressive pursuit of technological and diplomatic autonomy in the East while managing the fallout of Western-led energy sanctions. President Aleksandar Vučić's high-profile participation in the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi signals a strategic shift toward India as a key partner in defense, IT, and agriculture. This maneuver is designed to secure a "superpower" ally that remains steadfast in its non-recognition of Kosovo, especially as the 18th anniversary of Kosovo's independence declaration highlights the ongoing stagnation of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and the perceived failure of international law (Source, Source, Source).

Concurrently, the Serbian administration is under immense pressure to resolve the "NIS Crisis" before the February 20 expiration of the OFAC operational license. The potential transition of the Petroleum Industry of Serbia (NIS) from Russian to Hungarian (Mol) ownership is a complex geopolitical gambit intended to circumvent US sanctions while maintaining access to Russian crude via the "Družba" pipeline. Domestically, the government is besieged by a sustained agrarian revolt. Dairy and vegetable farmers have paralyzed major transport arteries (Ibarska Magistrala) for eight days, demanding import bans that the Ministry of Agriculture claims would trigger a total export collapse, revealing a deep fissure between state macro-policy and rural economic reality (Source, Source, Source).

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Strategic Partnership with India:** President Vučić and Prime Minister Narendra Modi defined three pillars of cooperation: innovative technologies (AI/IT), defense industry, and agriculture. India confirmed its participation in the Belgrade Expo 2027 and reiterated its support for Serbia's territorial integrity regarding Kosovo (Source, Source).
- **The NIS Ownership Transition:** With the US OFAC license expiring on February 20, negotiations for the Hungarian company Mol to acquire the Russian stake in NIS are in a critical phase. The move aims to secure Serbia's energy supply while pivoting to Hungarian management to avoid "toxic" Russian alignment (Source, Source).
- **Escalating Agrarian Blockades:** Farmers have expanded blockades to Mrčajevci, Zaklopača, Bogatić, and the Kragujevac-Topola road. Minister Glamočić has rejected demands for an import ban, citing the risk of retaliatory bans on Serbian exports, which are currently 28% higher than imports in the dairy sector (Source, Source, Source).

- **Geneva Peace Talks (Ukraine):** Trilateral negotiations between Russia, Ukraine, and the US (under the Trump administration) focused on a proposed demilitarized economic zone in Donbas. While progress was noted on military ceasefire monitoring, territorial sovereignty remains a deadlock, with Zelenskyy calling for a direct meeting with Putin (Source, Source, Source).
- **Government Internal Friction:** Prime Minister Đuro Macut publicly criticized ministers for prioritizing "Instagram promotion" over departmental efficiency, fueling rumors of a significant cabinet reconstruction or early elections before the end of 2026 (Source, Source).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Geopolitics and International Relations The Belgrade administration is attempting a "multi-vector" balancing act. By engaging with India on AI and defense, Serbia seeks to reduce its reliance on EU technology while leveraging India's refusal to recognize Kosovo (Source). Meanwhile, the Geneva talks suggest a shifting European security architecture where the "E3" (UK, France, Germany) are acting as observers to a US-driven peace process that could result in a "frozen conflict" model (Source, Source).

Energy Security Serbia is racing to diversify gas and oil sources. Discussions with Azerbaijan's Aliyev regarding a gas-fired power plant near Niš (350 MW) are framed as essential for compensating for the eventual decommissioning of coal-fired plants (Source). However, the immediate concern is the "Družba" pipeline and the threat of transit shutdowns through Ukraine (Source).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Critical Infrastructure Serbia is positioning itself as a regional AI hub, with Vučić highlighting the state-of-the-art data center in Kragujevac and the acquisition of a third supercomputer from France. The administration plans to integrate AI into healthcare (MRI results in 14 minutes) and the energy grid (Source, Source, Source).

Domestic Stability and Civil Unrest The ongoing "dairy war" represents a significant threat to social order. Protesters are increasingly radicalized following the failure of negotiations in the Government. The blockade of the Ibarska Magistrala and the new Moravski Corridor connection points indicates a high degree of tactical coordination among agrarian groups (Source, Source). Additionally, local protests in Novi Pazar over the "Golo Brdo" landfill have entered their eighth month, demonstrating persistent local governance failures (Source).

Legislation The government is implementing several new policies and regulatory frameworks:

- **Cyberstraža (Cyber-guard):** A new digital platform for citizens to report internet fraud and threats to children, set to launch by the end of the month (Source).
- **Agrarian Subsidy Reform:** New public calls for subsidies (18,000 RSD per hectare) will require farmers to justify expenses with receipts to ensure funds stay within the sector (Source).
- **Kosovo Property/Vehicle Laws:** New laws in Pristina regarding "foreigners and vehicles" are viewed by Belgrade as a mechanism for the "forced integration" or expulsion of Serbs (Source).
- **Electoral Reform:** Formation of the "Commission for the Revision of the Voter List" involving the opposition and NGO sector, aimed at addressing international concerns over electoral integrity (Source).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

Legislative activity is currently focused on digital surveillance and the restructuring of agricultural financial flows. The administration is also attempting to mitigate electoral fraud allegations through new commission structures while managing the fallout of Kosovo's internal regulatory shifts.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED

- **Voter List Revision Commission Mandate:** A body with 30+ competencies established to verify and clean the voter registry ahead of potential elections. (Source)
- **Law on Foreigners and Vehicles (Pristina):** Described as a punitive measure against the Serbian community in Kosovo, potentially leading to the closure of remaining health and education institutions. (Source)
- **Subsidized Credit Regulation:** Interest rates of 0% to 3% for mineral fertilizers and equipment for young/female farmers. (Source)

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS

- **Ministry of Agriculture-Farmer Summit:** A 90-minute failed negotiation between Minister Glamočić and milk producers. (Source)
- **VMA Infrastructure Meeting:** PM Macut met with military medical leaders to integrate military and civilian waiting lists for hip and knee surgeries. (Source)
- **Geneva Peace Briefing:** High-level statements from Medinsky (Russia), Umerov (Ukraine), and the US delegation regarding "tepid optimism" for a ceasefire. (Source)

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Trump Effect on Balkan and Global Diplomacy A recurring theme is the influence of US President Donald Trump. His administration is credited with forcing Russia and Ukraine to the table in Geneva and influencing Hungarian energy policy. Domestically, the Serbian Minister of Agriculture even referenced Trump's "whole milk in schools" law as a justification for promoting the Serbian dairy industry (Source, Source). This "Trumpian" alignment is being used by various factions to justify both protectionist and globalist policies.

Sanctions Evasion and Energy Realpolitik The potential sale of NIS to Mol is a masterclass in sanctions maneuvering. If Hungary (which has exemptions) takes control, the refinery in Pančevo can continue processing Russian crude without triggering US secondary sanctions. This "Hungarian Proxy" model is essential for Serbian domestic stability, as the state provides approximately 15% of its industrial output through NIS (Source).

Technological Sovereignty vs. Social Vulnerability There is a jarring disconnect between the government's rhetoric on "State of the Art supercomputers" and the reality of the Zlatibor region, where 30cm of snow caused widespread power outages and left some villages in the dark for hours (Source, Source). This highlights a "two-speed Serbia" where urban centers chase AI while rural infrastructure remains vulnerable to basic seasonal weather.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect a decision from OFAC regarding the NIS license extension. If denied, a fuel crisis is imminent. The agrarian protests will likely escalate to a blockade of the main Belgrade highway if the "import ban" demand is not met. Weather-induced flooding risks will increase as the Zlatibor snowpack (56cm) melts rapidly during the forecast 17°C warming trend (Source, Source, Source).
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The NIS-Mol deal will likely be finalized, potentially involving a joint venture with ADNOC (UAE) to provide further geopolitical cover. A government reconstruction is highly probable in May or June to "refresh" the administration's image before a high-stakes campaign season (Source, Source).
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** Serbia will increasingly integrate into a non-Western tech ecosystem led by India and China, particularly in AI and defense. The European security "E3" architecture will force Serbia to choose between NATO-aligned defense standards and its emerging "Global South" tech partnerships (Source, Source).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Security:** Observers should monitor the Belgrade-New Delhi defense talks; any significant transfer of munitions or missile tech to India could be a conduit for Serbia to offload production without Western oversight (Source).
- **Diplomatic:** The Geneva "Demilitarized Zone" proposal for Ukraine will be scrutinized by Belgrade as a potential precedent for North Kosovo (Source).
- **Regional Stability:** The "forced integration" narrative regarding Kosovo's new vehicle laws suggests an impending administrative exodus of Serbs by mid-March, potentially triggering a border crisis (Source).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Energy Risk:** Investors in Serbian manufacturing should anticipate potential volatility in fuel prices depending on the success of the NIS-Mol ownership transfer (Source).
- **Agribusiness:** The 68% year-on-year increase in fruit prices indicates a permanent structural shift in Serbian agriculture toward higher costs (labor and inputs), making the sector less competitive for export-oriented processing (Source).
- **Infrastructure/Expo 2027:** The commitment of India to participate in the Expo significantly increases the project's viability and potential for South Asian foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Surčin construction corridor (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.