

# TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

## ESPRESSO

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

### UKRAINE: YEAR FIVE BEGINS (FEB 2026)

- Geopolitical Shifts, Local Counter-Offensives, and the Fight for Stability

START OF YEAR 5 OF WAR

#### GEOPOLITICAL SHIFT & SECURITY POLICY

##### US ISOLATION & 'DEAL' FOCUS



107-MIN ADDRESS:  
"PEACE THROUGH DEALS"  
(MINIMAL UKRAINE MENTION)

Diminished total victory commitment. Focus on domestic "Golden Age".

##### EU AUTONOMY & FUNDING LEADERSHIP



90 BILLION EURO CREDIT  
(2026-2027)



SAFE MECHANISM  
(150 BN EURO DEFENSE FUND)  
& "NUCLEAR ANXIETY"  
(Joint Shield discussions)

GEOPOLITICAL CENTER OF GRAVITY SHIFTING TO BRUSSELS

#### MILITARY EVOLUTION & STRATEGIC LOSSES



ZSU LOCAL COUNTER-ATTACKS  
(Feb 2026, Zaporizhzhia/S. Dnipro):  
200 sq km liberated



IMMINENT LOSS OF POKROVSK & MYRNOHRAD:  
Critical logistics hubs fall

NEW DEFENSIVE PHASE:  
Protecting Donbas strongholds



RUSSIAN TACTICS CHANGE:  
From large assaults to 'INFILTRATION' & 'SNAIL'S PACE'  
(Attrition via small teams)

#### DOMESTIC CRISIS & GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES



MOBILIZATION STRAIN:  
"Bus-ification" vs. "TECHNOLOGICAL REFORM"  
(Drones & Contract Army to end coercive recruitment)



TERRORIST ATTACKS ON POLICE  
(Fragile social cohesion, likely Russian orchestration)



ENERGY BLACKMAIL  
(Druzhba Pipeline Offline, Aid Blocked by Orban)



RADA TOPICS:  
Military Social Protection (Passed), Discipline (Passed), Failed Drone Reg, Corruption Probes

#### STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & RECOMMENDATIONS

FORESIGHT

##### SHORT TERM

WEEKS:  
Final Pokrovsk Withdrawal, Major Russian Push to Slovyansk, Domestic Unrest Spike.

##### MEDIUM TERM

MONTHS (To Apr '26):  
Hungarian Elections Dictate EU Aid Flow, More Long-Range 'Flamingo' Strikes on Russian Oil.

##### LONG TERM

YEARS:  
Structural 'European Army' (SAFE), Epstein Scandal Fallout in EU (Potential Purges), Permanent Polish/Baltic Presence.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS



EU: Prepare Qualified Majority Voting Reform



GENEVA TRACK:  
Formalize European Security Advisors' Presence



INTEL COORDINATION:  
Mitigate Russian Blackmail (Epstein Files)

#### PRIVATE SECTOR OPPORTUNITIES



DEFENSE TECH:  
Focus on unregulated 'drone-assault' projects



DECENTRALIZED ENERGY:  
Solar/Battery for resilience (Schools/Hospitals)



REAL ESTATE RISK:  
Capital Flight from East to Western 'Rear' (Lviv/Poland)

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UKRAINE ENTERS FIFTH YEAR OF  
WAR AMIDST LOCAL COUNTER-  
OFFENSIVES, IMMINENT  
STRATEGIC CITY LOSSES, AND A  
DECOUPLING US-EUROPEAN  
SECURITY POLICY

### DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

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February 25, 2026, marks the beginning of the fifth year of the full-scale Russian invasion, characterized by a radical shift in the geopolitical and military landscape. Domestically, the Ukrainian Armed Forces (ZSU) have launched their first successful [complex counter-attack](#) in over two years, reportedly liberating 200 square kilometers in February alone. However, this tactical success is tempered by the [imminent loss of Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad](#), which signals a transition to a new defensive phase focused on protecting the remaining strongholds of the Donbas and the approaches to Dnipro.

The geopolitical "center of gravity" is visibly shifting from Washington to Brussels. While U.S. President Donald Trump delivered a marathon 107-minute address to Congress that [largely ignored Ukraine](#), the European Union has stepped in as the primary financial

guarantor, formalizing a 90-billion-euro credit facility for 2026-2027. This divergence is causing acute friction, as European leaders move toward "security autonomy," including discussions of a [joint nuclear shield](#) between France, Germany, and Poland, while the U.S. administration focuses on brokering a "business deal" peace that Kyiv fears will lead to a frozen conflict on Russian terms.

Internally, Ukraine faces a mounting stability crisis driven by a series of [terrorist attacks on police](#) in Lviv, Dnipro, and Mykolaiv, likely orchestrated by Russian intelligence to fragment social cohesion. The government is also grappling with a controversial "technological mobilization" reform aimed at addressing a [shortfall of personnel](#) and ending the "bus-ification" (forced recruitment) that has sparked public outcry. These domestic tensions are exacerbated by energy blackmail from Hungary and Slovakia, who are leveraging their control over electricity and fuel imports to force a resumption of Russian oil transit through the [Druzhba pipeline](#).

### MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

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- **Military Evolution and Localized Gains:** ZSU forces conducted a surprise counter-offensive on the Zaporizhzhia and Southern Dnipro fronts, [clearing several border villages](#) and pushing Russian forces back 4-5 km. However, analysts confirm that the fourth year of the war ends with the [de-facto loss of Pokrovsk](#), a critical logistics hub, forcing a shift in defense toward Slovyansk and Kramatorsk.

- **The "Trump Address" and U.S. Isolationism:** President Trump's address to Congress prioritized domestic economic "Golden Age" rhetoric and Iran, spending [only five minutes on Ukraine](#). He characterized the conflict as a "massacre" of 25,000 soldiers per month and focused on a "peace through deals" approach that omits traditional security guarantees, signaling a [diminishing U.S. commitment](#) to a total Ukrainian victory.
- **European Security Autonomy (SAFE):** The EU launched the "Security Action for Europe" (SAFE) mechanism, a [150-billion-euro fund](#) for joint defense procurement and modernization. Poland is set to be a primary beneficiary, though domestic political infighting between the Tusk government and the PiS opposition threatens to [delay credit repayments](#).
- **Geneva Peace Track Stagnation:** Bilateral talks in Geneva (Feb 17-18) between the U.S., Ukraine, and Russia yielded [limited progress](#). While technical military groups discussed disengagement zones, the political track remains stalled due to Russia's [ideological delegation](#) led by Medinsky and maximalist demands for the entire Donbas.
- **Epstein Scandal Fallout in Europe:** Former Norwegian PM and Council of Europe head Torbjørn Jagland [attempted suicide](#) after his name appeared in newly unsealed Jeffrey Epstein documents. Analysts suggest Russian intelligence may be using [compromat from this network](#) to blackmail European elites into pro-Russian policy shifts.

## KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

**MOBILIZATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL REFORM**  
**PRESIDENT ZELENSKY HAS TASKED DEFENSE MINISTER IVAN FEDOROV WITH IMPLEMENTING A [MORE TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MOBILIZATION TO END COERCIVE STREET RECRUITMENT](#). THE PLAN AIMS TO INCREASE [ENEMY LOSSES TO 200 PER SQUARE KM](#) USING DRONES WHILE TRANSITIONING TO A [CONTRACT-BASED ARMY](#) IF EUROPEAN FUNDING FOR SALARIES CAN BE SECURED.**

**ENERGY SECURITY AND BLACKMAIL**  
**THE "DRUZHBA" PIPELINE REMAINS OFFLINE FOLLOWING A JANUARY RUSSIAN STRIKE. HUNGARY'S VIKTOR ORBAN IS [BLOCKING THE 90-BILLION-EURO EU AID PACKAGE](#) UNTIL TRANSIT IS RESTORED, WHILE SLOVAKIA'S ROBERT FICO HAS THREATENED TO [HALT EMERGENCY ELECTRICITY EXPORTS TO UKRAINE](#). EXPERTS ADVISE KYIV TO [RESIST REPAIRING THE PIPELINE](#) TO PERMANENTLY DECOUPLE THE EU FROM RUSSIAN CRUDE.**

**CYBERSECURITY AND DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY**  
**A DEBATE IS RAGING IN THE RADA OVER THE [ROLE OF TELEGRAM](#) IN FACILITATING RUSSIAN SABOTAGE. SECURITY OFFICIALS CLAIM THE [KILLERS OF IRINA FARION](#) AND OTHER HIGH-PROFILE TARGETS WERE RECRUITED VIA THE PLATFORM. THERE ARE CALLS TO [BAN OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT CHANNELS](#)**

## FROM TELEGRAM TO SIGNAL ITS LACK OF VERIFICATION.

**CORRUPTION AND RULE OF LAW**  
**THE HIGH COUNCIL OF JUSTICE**  
**OPENED NEW DISCIPLINARY**  
**PROCEEDINGS AGAINST JUDGE**  
**YAROSLAV VASYLENKO FOR**  
**[REPEATEDLY VISITING OCCUPIED](#)**  
**[CRIMEA](#) AND FAILING TO DECLARE**  
**RUSSIAN ASSETS.**  
**SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE RADA IS**  
**INVESTIGATING "VIP DRAFT**  
**DODGERS" AND [CORRUPTION IN](#)**  
**[THE CONSTRUCTION OF AIRCRAFT](#)**  
**[SHELTERS](#), WHERE A LOGISTICS**  
**COMMANDER ALLEGEDLY OFFERED**  
**A 13-MILLION-UAH BRIBE TO THE**  
**SBU.**

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## LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

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The Verkhovna Rada held a contentious session focused on military social protection and wartime governance, marked by [emotional outbursts](#) regarding the "busification" of citizens and the lack of clear service terms.

### BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Bill 13646 (Social Protection):** Passed in its entirety, this law [increases social guarantees](#) for soldiers in basic military service and their families, including 15-million-UAH payouts for families of missing or deceased personnel.
- **Bill 13037 (Military Discipline):** Passed in its entirety, aimed at [preventing discrimination and sexual harassment](#) within the ZSU to improve organizational health.

- **Bill 13600 (Drone Regulation):** Failed to pass. It sought to create a [mandatory registry for all drones](#) over 250 grams, but was rejected as "untimely" and a potential hindrance to the volunteer drone manufacturing sector.
- **Civil Code Overhaul (Marriage at 14):** Facing a [massive public backlash](#), Speaker Stefanchuk indicated the Rada would remove a provision allowing [marriage at age 14](#) in cases of pregnancy, noting it contradicts European human rights standards.
- **Bill 14303 (Cultural Heritage):** Discussed as a priority to allow [construction of the Museum of Dignity](#) on the site of the Maidan massacres by lifting long-standing land arrests.

## HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Minister Fedorov's War Plan:** Presented a [three-pillar strategy](#) for Year 5: 95% interception rate for air defense, halting Russian advances via high-attrition drone warfare, and absolute economic isolation of Russia.
- **Coalition of the Willing Meeting:** Leaders from 26 nations met in Kyiv (online and in person) to [reaffirm long-term support](#), though secret reports suggest many are [unwilling to deploy troops](#) without Russian consent.
- **Energy Strategy Briefing:** Experts emphasized that [decentralizing the energy grid](#) is now a "second front" as Russia shifts targets from major plants to regional distribution hubs.

## DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

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**The European Pivot and "Nuclear Anxiety"** With the U.S. shifting toward a transaction-based foreign policy under Trump, Europe is experiencing a ["Renaissance of Identity."](#) However, this is fraught with internal divisions. The discussion of a [joint nuclear shield](#) funded by Germany but based on French technology reflects a fear that the U.S. "nuclear umbrella" is being retracted. Poland's record [45 billion euro defense budget](#) for 2026 underscores its role as the new frontline state of the West.

**Mobilization vs. "Bus-ification"** The social contract in Ukraine is under severe strain. The rift between the Rada's "elite" and the [2 million men in hiding](#) from the draft is being exploited by Russian "IPSO" campaigns. The government's move toward [recruitment through technology](#) and higher pay is a desperate attempt to professionalize the force and reduce the ["obshchak" \(unit slush fund\)](#) culture where soldiers pay for their own spare parts.

**Russian Tactics: From "Meat" to "Infiltration"** Russia has adapted to ZSU drone dominance by abandoning large armored assaults. In 2025, mechanised attacks [almost vanished](#), replaced by "infiltrations" of 2-3 man teams who hide in basements to establish ["flag-planting" claims](#). This "snail's pace" movement (less than 1% of territory in 2025) nonetheless remains dangerous because it [grinds down Ukrainian infantry](#) in a war of attrition where Russia still holds a population advantage.

## STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

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- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect the final withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from the Pokrovsk-Myrnohrad sector and a [major Russian push](#) toward Slovyansk and Kramatorsk. Domestic unrest in Ukraine may spike following the [police targeted bombings](#), leading to a potential temporary crackdown on anonymous social media platforms.
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The Hungarian parliamentary elections in April 2026 will dictate the flow of EU aid. Orban is likely to [maintain his veto](#) until the last moment to maximize electoral gain. Ukraine will likely launch more ["Flamingo" long-range strikes](#) against Russian oil infrastructure to crash their export revenue, which has already [dropped to \\$25-30 per barrel](#).
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** The structural formation of a "European Army" or "SAFE" block will likely lead to a [permanent military presence](#) of Polish and Baltic troops in non-combat regions of Ukraine. The Epstein scandal fallout could trigger [regime instability](#) in multiple European capitals, potentially purging Russian-influenced officials.

## RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

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### For International Policy:

- The EU should prepare for a [qualified majority voting reform](#) to prevent single states like Hungary from paralyzing the 20th sanctions package and macro-financial aid.

- The "Geneva Track" needs to formalize the presence of [European security advisors](#) at the table to ensure any "frozen conflict" deal includes hard security guarantees beyond U.S. "assurances."
- Western intelligence must coordinate on the [Epstein files](#) to mitigate the impact of Russian blackmail on democratic stability.

#### **For Private Sector/Investors:**

- **Defense Tech:** The rejection of the drone registry bill (13600) confirms that Ukraine remains a ["Wild West" for military innovation](#); investors should focus on the 18 new "drone-assault" projects funded by the latest aid packages.
- **Energy Infrastructure:** There is significant opportunity in [decentralized solar and battery projects](#) for schools and hospitals, as the central grid remains a primary target for Russian "winter terror."
- **Real Estate Risk:** The [40% collapse in Kyiv's secondary housing market](#) and the shift toward Slovyansk as a battleground suggest a major capital flight from Eastern and Central Ukraine toward the Western "rear" (Lviv/Poland).

## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

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**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](mailto: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>.