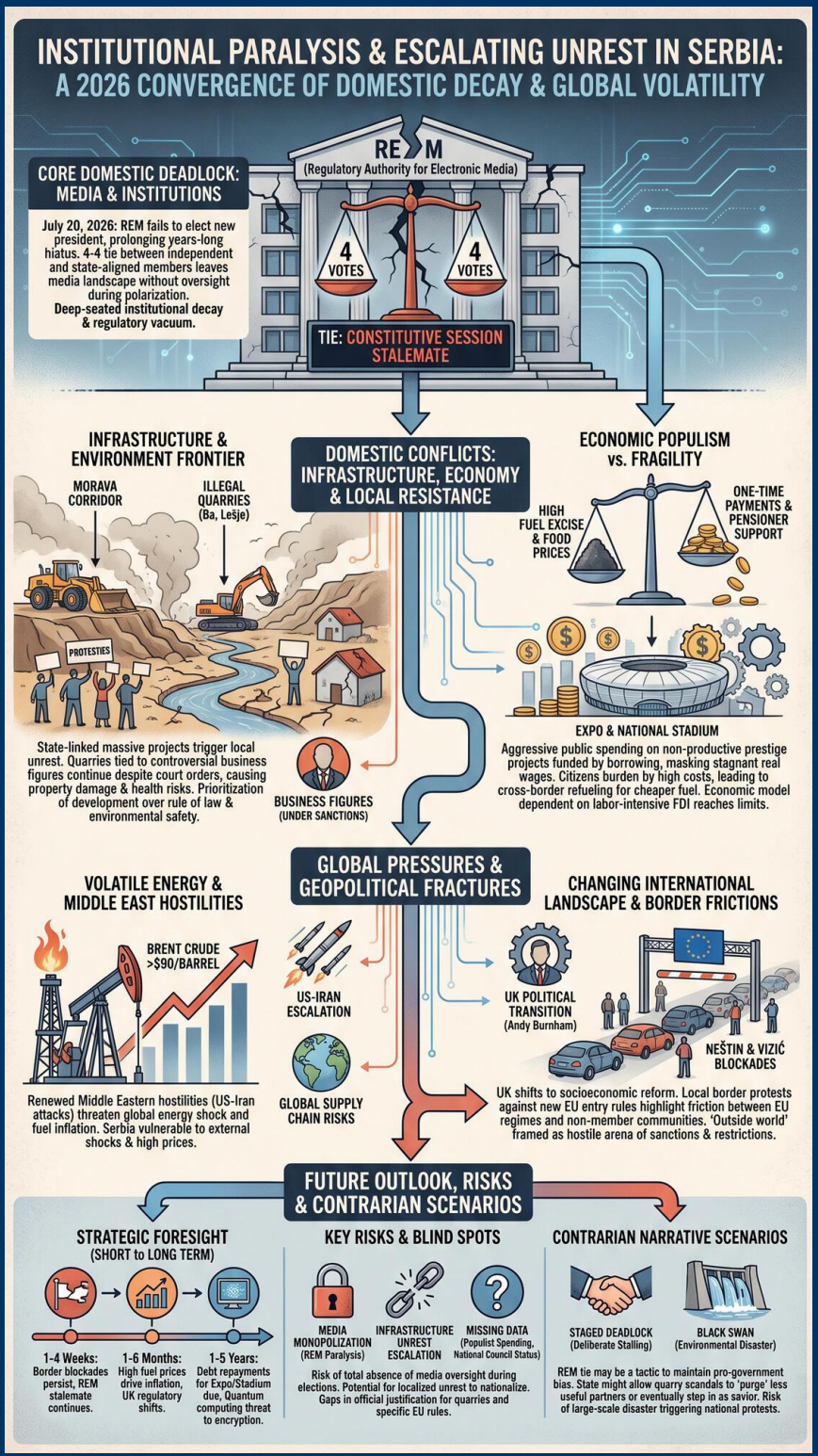
TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

N1SRP

JULY 20, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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INSTITUTIONAL PARALYSIS IN SERBIA'S MEDIA REGULATION COINCIDES WITH ESCALATING DOMESTIC UNREST OVER STATE-LINKED INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS AND A VOLATILE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET DRIVEN BY RENEWED MIDDLE EASTERN HOSTILITIES.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

July 20, 2026, was defined by a critical deadlock in Serbian media governance, as the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) failed to elect a new president despite a **constitutive session** intended to end a years-long hiatus. The 4-4 tie between members perceived as independent and those aligned with state interests highlights a deep-seated institutional decay that leaves the nation's media landscape without oversight during a period of increasing polarization and alleged state-led monopolies. This regulatory vacuum persists as the government continues to push massive infrastructure projects, such as the Morava Corridor, which have triggered local resistance and environmental concerns, particularly regarding the **illegal operation of quarries** tied to controversial business figures.

Economically, the Serbian state is balancing aggressive public spending on prestige projects like the "Expo" and the National Stadium against a public increasingly burdened by **high fuel excises** and food prices. Domestic stability is further challenged by localized protests, such as the border blockades in Neštin and Vizić, where residents demand exemptions from new EU entry rules. Globally, the environment is framed by the ascension of Andy Burnham as the UK's Prime Minister, who promises a "circuit breaker" for British politics, and a sharp escalation in US-Iran tensions that has pushed Brent crude **above $90 per barrel**, threatening global supply chain resilience and fueling inflation.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Regulatory Deadlock at REM:** The first session of the new REM council resulted in a 4-4 tie between candidates Miloš Garić and Mileva Malešić, preventing the body from addressing hundreds of backlogged complaints and licensing renewals. The deadlock signifies a struggle for control over the information environment ahead of potential spring elections.
- **Infrastructure and Environmental Conflict:** Investigative reports have highlighted the illegal exploitation of quarries in Ba and Lešje, where residents report property damage and health risks from dust. These operations are linked to the Morava Corridor construction and controversial businessmen Zvonko Veselinović and Milan Radojičić, who remain under international sanctions.

- **UK Political Transition:** Andy Burnham has assumed the premiership in the United Kingdom, promising socioeconomic stability and a new economic model to combat the cost-of-living crisis, representing a significant shift in the UK's domestic posture.
- **Middle Eastern Escalation:** A series of attacks between US and Iranian forces, including strikes on Bahrejn and Kuvejt, has driven oil prices to a dangerous threshold, triggering concerns of a global energy shock.
- **Technological Frontiers and Risks:** Advancements in **quantum computing** and AI-driven disaster response are being tempered by the rising threat of deepfakes and the potential for quantum systems to render current encryption obsolete within a decade.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Leadership Dynamics & Governance: The Serbian government is facing a crisis of legitimacy regarding independent regulatory bodies. The REM deadlock is not merely procedural but reflects a deliberate effort to maintain a pro-government bias in media oversight. Similarly, the appointment of university rectors is being adjusted to require stricter senate majorities, signaling a tightening of institutional control.

Critical Infrastructure Security: The Morava Corridor project, while framed as a national priority, is exposing vulnerabilities in local governance. The use of illegal quarries and the failure of state inspections to halt work despite court orders suggests that infrastructure development is being prioritized over the rule of law and environmental safety.

Macroeconomics & Trade: Serbia's economic model, heavily dependent on **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** in labor-intensive sectors, is reaching its limits. The closure of textile and automotive plants (e.g., Geox, Lear) has left the state without a clear replacement, leading to massive borrowing to fund construction projects that provide only temporary GDP growth.

Geopolitical Competition: The "outside world" is increasingly framed as a hostile arena of sanctions and border restrictions. The blockades at the Croatian border by residents of Neštin and Vizić highlight the friction between **EU regulatory regimes** and non-member border communities, with local citizens feeling abandoned by their own government.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of Regulation: Media regulation in Serbia has transitioned from a tool of oversight to a battlefield for political survival. By keeping REM in a state of functional paralysis, the state effectively permits a media monopoly by Telekom and its affiliates, while stifling independent outlets. This trend extends to the legal system, where business figures tied to the ruling elite appear to operate with near-total immunity despite repeated environmental and labor violations.

Economic Populism vs. Systemic Fragility: The government is utilizing **one-time payments** to pensioners and young adults as a primary tool for social order, a strategy critics label as "buying support" with borrowed funds. This populist spending masks a fragile macroeconomic environment where real wages are stagnant relative to the high cost of European-level food and energy prices.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Serbia is experiencing significant institutional decay characterized by the **erosion of regulatory independence**. The REM constitutive session was a public display of polarization, with the 4-4 tie reflecting a council split between "independent" members and those who "lean toward the authorities." Public sentiment is increasingly agitated by state-linked business practices; the quarrying scandals in Ba and Lešje have turned local populations against infrastructure projects they initially welcomed. The government's mandate is further tested by labor issues, with reports of unpaid wages in construction firms and the closure of foreign-owned factories, suggesting a growing disconnect between elite economic narratives and the reality of the working class.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The broadcast frames the global system as an **unstable and hostile arena**. For Serbia, this manifests as a defensive reaction to EU border policies and a vulnerability to global energy shocks. The state is attempting to project power through domestic construction (Expo, Stadium) while simultaneously retreating into **protectionist rhetoric** regarding its "threatened" interests. The international system is portrayed as fracturing, with the US-Iran conflict and the ongoing war in Ukraine serving as primary drivers of economic and security anxiety.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Serbian economy is characterized by high state spending and significant inflationary pressure on essential goods. While June inflation was reported at 2.7%, food prices remain at West European levels, severely impacting purchasing power. The government continues to rely on **external borrowing** to fund large-scale infrastructure, raising the national debt to levels that critics warn are unsustainable without a shift to a high-value, knowledge-based economy.

- **Energy Prices:** Brent crude has surpassed $90 per barrel due to Middle Eastern conflict.
- **Capital Flows:** Heavy investment in **non-productive infrastructure** (Stadiums, Expo) is temporarily lifting GDP but creating long-term debt liabilities.
- **Sanctions Impact:** Business figures Veselinović and Radojičić remain on US Treasury blacklists, yet their firms (Inkop, Granit Peščar) continue to receive major state contracts.
- **Consumer Market:** High fuel excises in Serbia lead to citizens traveling to Bosnia or Macedonia to refuel, representing a significant leakage of tax revenue.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Major leadership shifts are occurring both domestically and internationally, signaling changes in strategic direction and internal power balances.

- **Andy Burnham:** The new UK Prime Minister represents a move toward socioeconomic reform and increased state intervention in the economy.
- **REM Council:** The current deadlock indicates a **power struggle** between the incumbent pro-government faction led by figures like Olivera Zekić and a new group of independent members.

- **Vladimir Zelenski:** The Ukrainian President has dismissed his Prime Minister and Defense Minister, signaling a major strategic reshuffle amidst intensifying Russian attacks.
- **Branko Miljković:** The "King of the Roads" continues to dominate the construction sector despite legal battles and public controversy, suggesting his faction remains untouchable within the current Serbian political hierarchy.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network maintains a **critically skeptical tone** toward the Serbian government, prioritizing stories of institutional failure (REM) and corporate-state collusion (the quarry scandals). The lead stories emphasize the paralysis of the state's regulatory apparatus and the environmental costs of infrastructure development. "Buried" stories include the broader progress of the Morava Corridor, which is mentioned only in the context of its negative impacts. The broadcast is fear-inducing regarding the economy (fuel prices, inflation) and the international security situation (US-Iran, Ukraine). A conspicuous omission is any detailed government defense of the quarry operations, with the reporting focusing almost exclusively on resident complaints and investigative findings.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The global arena is portrayed as a fracturing multipolar system where small nations like Serbia are buffeted by the decisions of major powers and blocs.

- **Serbia:** Framed as a state with **eroding institutions** and a corrupt link between business elites and government officials. Examples include the description of "state-linked business figures" operating with illegal quarries.
- **United Kingdom:** Portrayed as a nation in **transition**, seeking stability under Andy Burnham's new leadership after years of political turmoil.
- **Iran:** Characterized as a **hostile aggressor** and target, with its actions directly impacting global energy security.
- **Croatia/EU:** Framed as a **bureaucratic foe** to local Serbian border communities, enforcing rigid entry systems that disrupt daily life.
- **Telekom Srbija:** Implicitly portrayed as a **state-supported monopoly** used to control the media landscape and marginalize independent voices.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

Domestic media is a primary theater of information warfare. The government is accused of launching active campaigns against independent journalists, framing them as "foreign mercenaries" to delegitimize their reporting. The deadlock at REM is a form of passive censorship, where the absence of a regulator allows pro-government narratives to dominate the airwaves without challenge. On the international front, the broadcast highlights the **weaponization of deepfakes** and the ongoing battle for "authenticity" in the AI age, noting that software must be

constantly retrained to identify manipulated imagery.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Media Monopolization:** The REM deadlock will likely persist until the government can secure a compliant fifth vote, ensuring that the media environment remains favorable to the ruling party during the next election cycle.
- **Infrastructure Unrest:** Local resistance to quarrying and environmental destruction will likely **escalate into broader civil unrest** if state firms continue to ignore court orders and inspection bans.
- **Energy Shock:** If US-Iran hostilities continue to escalate, Serbia will face severe **fiscal pressure** to maintain its current fuel price caps or populist spending, potentially leading to an IMF intervention.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Continued border blockades in Neštin and Vizić are likely to force a diplomatic intervention by the Serbian government with Croatian authorities. A second attempt to elect the REM president will likely result in further stalemate unless back-room deals are struck.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The impact of **high fuel prices** will manifest in increased logistical costs for Serbian goods, likely driving another wave of food price inflation. Regulatory shifts in the UK under Burnham may lead to new trade formalizations with non-EU states.

Long Term (1-5 Years): The quantum computing race will reach a critical point where current financial and national security encryption must be fundamentally redesigned. Serbia's current economic model may face a hard landing as debt repayments for the Expo and Stadium projects become due during a global economic slowdown.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Institutional Paralysis at REM:** The risk is a total absence of media oversight during a national election. Triggers: Failure of the next council session to elect a president. Likelihood: High. Impact: Critical (loss of media pluralism). Mitigations: International pressure on media freedom standards.
- **Regional Infrastructure Flashpoints:** The quarry scandals could trigger violent clashes between residents and private security/workers. Triggers: Continued mining despite inspection bans. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High (civil unrest). Mitigations: Enforcement of environmental law and court orders.
- **Global Energy Shock:** Oil prices sustained over $100/barrel. Triggers: Further US-Iran military exchanges. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Severe (global recession). Mitigations: Strategic reserve releases and increased diplomatic mediation.
- **Cybersecurity Obsolescence:** Quantum computers breaking RSA encryption. Triggers: Breakthroughs in logical qubit scaling. Likelihood: High (within 5-10 years). Impact: Catastrophic (total loss of data privacy). Mitigations: Rapid deployment of **post-quantum cryptography**.

- **Loss of Domestic Economic Mandate:** Populist spending failing to keep pace with the cost of living. Triggers: Sustained inflation in food and energy. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High (political instability). Mitigations: Fiscal reform and high-value economic investment.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The broadcast fails to provide the government's official legal justification for the quarries, focusing only on resident and activist claims.
- There is a lack of detail on the specific "EU entry rules" causing the border blockades, which is necessary to assess whether the issue is systemic or a localized administrative error.
- The transcripts do not quantify the total amount of "populist spending" relative to the national budget, making it difficult to assess the actual fiscal risk.
- There is no mention of the current status of the "Nacionalni Savet" (National Council), which is supposed to appoint the ninth REM member, leaving a critical piece of the institutional puzzle missing.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

Staged Deadlock: The REM tie may not be a sign of independent strength but a **deliberate stalling tactic** by the state to prevent any regulatory decisions (such as revoking licenses) until after the next election. In this view, the "independent" members are being used to create a facade of democratic process while the status quo remains unchanged.

Managed Infrastructure Scandal: The state may be allowing the quarry controversies to simmer as a way to "purge" less useful business partners or to eventually step in as a "savior" by closing the quarries once the bulk of the construction material has already been extracted, thus pacifying the public without halting the Morava Corridor.

Black Swan: A **large-scale environmental disaster** (e.g., a massive landslide in Lešje) caused by illegal quarrying could lead to a sudden and uncontrollable wave of national protests, mirroring the "Lithium protests" of previous years and threatening regime stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Restore institutional credibility by ensuring the **immediate appointment** of the ninth REM member through transparent procedures.
- Strictly enforce environmental regulations at state-linked infrastructure sites to prevent localized unrest from nationalizing.
- Negotiate bilateral border exemptions with Croatia to mitigate the socio-economic impact of EU entry rules on border communities.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Monitor **geopolitical risk in Serbia's construction sector**; firms linked to sanctioned individuals or environmental violations face high reputational and legal risks.
- Prepare for **increased logistical costs** due to high domestic fuel excises and global oil volatility.

- Invest in **post-quantum encryption** solutions immediately, as the window for current cryptographic standards is closing faster than previously estimated.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity centered on the reform of media laws and the regulation of university governance, alongside local government actions to facilitate infrastructure projects.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**
  - **Electronic Media Act:** Proposed changes to how REM members are selected and the extent of their powers over broadcasters.
  - **University Statute Amendments:** Changes requiring a majority of senate votes for rector appointments, aimed at centralizing academic control.
  - **Plan for Detailed Regulation (Paraćin):** Local policy changed at short notice to facilitate quarrying in forested areas, currently being contested in court.
- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**
  - **REM Constitutive Session:** A failed attempt to elect a new leadership, resulting in a 4-4 tie.
  - **Protest at Neštin/Vizić:** Public demonstration and press event by residents demanding border crossing rights.
  - **UK Prime Minister's Inaugural Address:** Andy Burnham outlining his "circuit breaker" economic plan.

KEY STORIES

- **REM Council Standoff:** The first session of the new REM council failed to elect a president, ending in a 4-4 tie between candidates Miloš Garić and Mileva Malešić. The body remains paralyzed, unable to address backlogged complaints or licensing issues.
- **Illegal Quarrying in Ba:** Residents of Ba report that the Granit Peščar quarry, owned by individuals under international sanctions, continues to operate illegally, causing severe damage to homes and the environment despite multiple inspection bans.
- **Lešje Quarry and Morava Corridor:** Intensive mining for the Morava Corridor project has caused water sources in the village of Lešje to dry up, threatening a historic monastery and local agriculture.
- **UK Leadership Transition:** Andy Burnham is officially the new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, promising a radical shift in economic policy to address inflation and declining living standards.
- **US-Iran Military Exchange:** Tensions in the Middle East have escalated with attacks on US assets in Bahrejn and Kuvejt, driving oil prices over $90 per barrel.
- **Neštin and Vizić Border Protests:** Residents have blocked the border with Croatia for six days, protesting new EU entry systems that restrict their movement and access to work/school.
- **Ukraine Reshuffle and Attacks:** President Zelenski has fired his Prime Minister and Defense Minister as Russia launches a massive drone attack (400 drones) on Moscow and Odesa.

- **Economic Populism in Serbia:** The government announced one-time payments for pensioners and youth, a move critics call "pre-election bribery" funded by increased debt.
- **Quantum Computing Threats:** Scientists warn that quantum computers will be able to break current encryption standards within 10 years, necessitating a shift to new security protocols.
- **PFAS Treatment with Plasma:** Researchers in Stuttgart have developed a system using plasma to break down "forever chemicals" (PFAS) in contaminated water.
- **Spain Wins World Cup:** The Spanish national team defeated Argentina 1-0 in the final, though the match was marred by reports of player scuffles and poor behavior by Argentine stars.
- **Manatee Starvation in Florida:** A legal victory for Bear Warriors United against the State of Florida regarding the starvation of manatees due to seagrass loss from septic tank pollution.
- **AI Disaster Response:** Researchers are testing biobots and drones for disaster search-and-rescue, but warn that signal reliability remains a critical failure point.
- **Serbia High Fuel Prices:** Serbian citizens are increasingly refueling in neighboring Bosnia or Macedonia to avoid the region's highest fuel excises.

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.

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