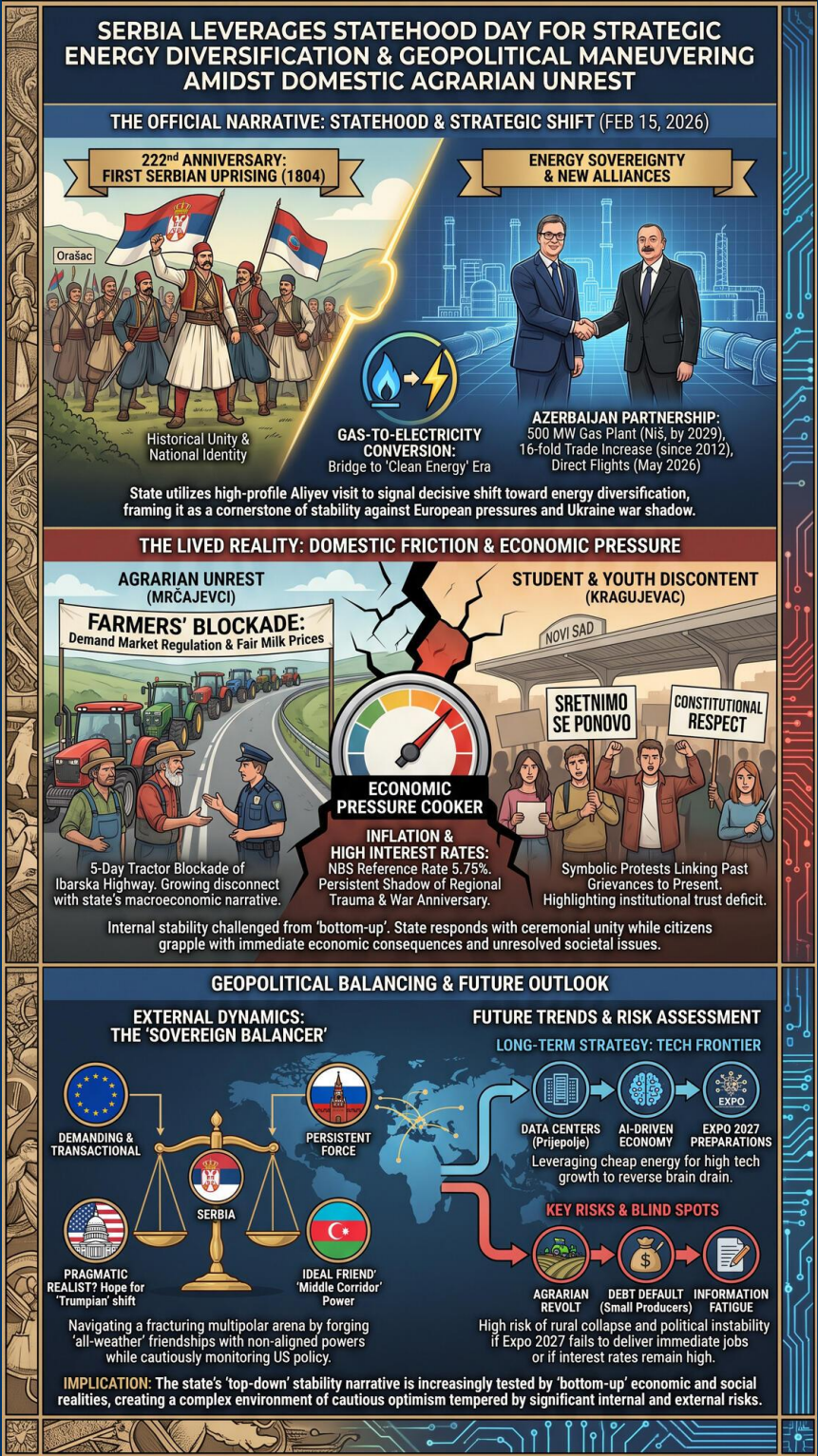


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

RTS1

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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SERBIA LEVERAGES STATEHOOD
DAY FOR STRATEGIC ENERGY
DIVERSIFICATION AND
GEOPOLITICAL MANEUVERING
AMIDST DOMESTIC AGRARIAN
UNREST

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The broadcasts of February 15, 2026, center on the dual themes of national identity—celebrated through the 222nd anniversary of the First Serbian Uprising—and the practical pursuit of energy sovereignty. The state is utilizing the high-profile visit of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to signal a decisive shift toward energy diversification, notably through the announcement of a [500 MW gas power plant](#) in Niš and a 16-fold increase in trade since 2012. This "strategic partnership" is framed as a cornerstone of Serbian stability, providing a counterbalance to the pressures of European integration and the looming four-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine.

Simultaneously, the government faces significant internal friction. Dairy producers in Mrčajevci and students in Kragujevac are engaging in disruptive protests, highlighting a [growing disconnect](#) between the state's

macroeconomic narrative and the lived reality of the agricultural and youth sectors. While the state celebrates historical unity, the news reports reveal a nation grappling with the immediate consequences of inflation, high interest rates (5.75%), and the persistent shadow of regional trauma, evidenced by the anniversary of the Novi Sad station tragedy and ongoing legal battles for KLA leaders in The Hague.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Energy and Strategic Alliances

- The announcement of a [major gas power plant](#) near Niš, projected for completion by 2029, marks a significant infrastructure milestone.
- Serbia and Azerbaijan signed seven bilateral agreements covering food security, telecommunications, and culture, while confirming mutual support for [territorial integrity](#).
- Establishment of direct air routes between Belgrade and Baku by May 2026 to facilitate economic and diplomatic exchange.

Domestic Civil Unrest

- Dairy farmers continue a five-day [tractor blockade](#) of the Ibarska highway, demanding market regulation and price stabilization for milk.
- Students in Kragujevac held a symbolic protest under the slogan "Sretnimo se ponovo," linking contemporary grievances to the historic Sretenje Constitution.
- Transport operators from the Western Balkans are threatening to block freight crossings over [Schengen zone](#) residency restrictions.

Ukraine Conflict Anniversary and Global Security

- As the conflict nears its four-year mark on February 24, Russian forces are reported to have seized [200 square kilometers](#) and 12 settlements in the last two weeks.
- US officials, including Marco Rubio, are promoting 15-year security guarantees for Ukraine, while Kyiv seeks 30 to 50-year commitments.
- The Munich Security Conference highlights a growing "European awakening" regarding defense autonomy and independent supply chains.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization The ongoing KLA leadership trials in The Hague continue to serve as a focal point for regional narrative warfare, with the prosecution seeking [45-year sentences](#) for Hashim Thaçi and others. Concurrently, the Serbian military is featured prominently in Statehood Day ceremonies, emphasizing the link between historical uprisings and modern defense readiness.

Energy & Critical Minerals The Serbian-Azerbaijani partnership is now centered on gas-to-electricity conversion. President Vučić emphasized that "Serbia enjoys great respect" because of its [economic performance](#) and infrastructure projects, specifically identifying gas as the bridge to a "clean energy" era that remains compliant with EU standards.

Diplomacy & Statecraft Serbia is actively courting "Middle Corridor" powers like Azerbaijan while managing complex relations with the EU and the US. The framing of the [US stance](#) through Marco Rubio suggests a Serbian hope for a more transactional and

less ideological American foreign policy that respects Serbian interests in the Balkans.

Macroeconomics & Trade The National Bank of Serbia (NBS) maintains a [5.75% reference rate](#) to curb inflation. Despite these high rates, the state is pushing a narrative of "unprecedented economic success," pointing to the 16x growth in trade with Baku as proof of viable alternatives to Western-centric economic reliance.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Transition to Energy Sovereignty Serbia is shifting from a passive consumer of energy to a potential regional hub. The partnership with SOCAR and the plans for [data centers](#) from Prijepolje to Belgrade indicate a long-term strategy to leverage cheap energy for a high-tech "AI-driven" economy. This move is presented not just as economic policy, but as a survival necessity in a world where "everything will change in two months," according to citations of Elon Musk.

The "Second Sretenje" and National Rebirth Statehood Day is being used to weave a coherent narrative of "Freedom and Development." By linking the 1804 uprising to the [Expo 2027](#) preparations, the state is attempting to modernize the concept of Serbian resistance, moving from the battlefield to the global economic arena. However, this narrative is contested by those (farmers and students) who feel excluded from this projected prosperity.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Serbia's internal state is characterized by a "top-down" stability that is increasingly

challenged from the "bottom-up." The [farmers' protests](#) in Mrčajevci are not merely about milk prices; they represent a fundamental dissatisfaction with state agricultural policies that many rural producers feel favor large-scale trade at the expense of local livelihoods. The government is attempting to manage this through a mix of administrative measures, such as the regulation of trade margins, and the promotion of successful local vignettes (e.g., the Stepanov vineyard or the Selmanović goat farm) to project a sense of rural viability.

Furthermore, the [anniversary of the Novi Sad canopy collapse](#) and the subsequent silence in Kragujevac indicate a deep-seated institutional trust deficit. The state's response is a heavy emphasis on ceremonial unity and the distribution of "Sretenje decorations" to loyalist figures, a traditional tactic to consolidate the elite and pacify the bureaucracy during times of underlying societal tension.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

Serbia is projecting itself as a **sovereign balancer** in an anarchic global system. The world is framed as a "fracturing multipolar arena" where traditional alliances (like NATO and the EU) are becoming increasingly demanding and transactional. Serbia's response is to forge "all-weather" friendships with non-aligned or strategic energy powers. The Aliyev visit is the primary piece of evidence for this [strategic maneuverability](#).

Simultaneously, the state is cautiously monitoring the [evolution of US foreign policy](#). The prominence given to Marco Rubio's remarks suggests that Belgrade is betting on a "Trumpian" or nationalist-realist shift in

Washington that might view Serbia as a "strong and stable" regional partner rather than a problem to be solved. This is contrasted with the "hostile" framing of regional neighbors like Tirana and Pristina, who are portrayed as conspiring to isolate Serbia through military cooperation.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic climate is one of cautious optimism tempered by high borrowing costs and inflationary pressures. The state narrative focuses on "resilience," but the data shows a heavy reliance on foreign investment to sustain growth.

- **Interest Rates:** NBS maintains the reference rate at [5.75%](#).
- **Currency Stability:** The RSD remains stable at approximately [117.4 to the Euro](#), supported by "significant foreign exchange reserves."
- **Bilateral Trade:** Trade with Azerbaijan has reached [170 million USD](#) annually, with plans for rapid expansion.
- **Energy Costs:** Gas supply from Azerbaijan is cited as a key mitigator of the global energy crisis.
- **Agrarian Crisis:** Farmers are demanding the reintroduction of "prelevmani" (import levies) to protect domestic milk production.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

While no major resignations occurred, the day showcased the "succession and loyalty" structure of the current administration.

- **Miloš Vučević:** Acted as the [President's envoy](#) at the Tomb of the Unknown Hero, confirming his status as the primary lieutenant for ceremonial and high-state functions.
- **Đuro Macut:** Featured as a key government [interlocutor on Statehood Day](#), defending the administration's record on unity and economic stability.
- **Marta Kos:** Portrayed as a "principled opponent" within the EU framework, used as a foil to demonstrate Serbia's "independent" stance on judicial reforms.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The editorial tone is **Nationalistic, Assertive, and Reassuring**. The lead story is consistently the Statehood Day celebrations and the Aliyev visit, creating a "Meta-Narrative" of a strong Serbia returning to its historical roots while building a future of "High-Tech and High-Energy."

Buried Stories: The [dairy farmer protests](#) and the student blockades are given minimal airtime compared to the ceremonial events. The collapse of the Novi Sad station canopy is relegated to a "moment of silence," avoiding any mention of investigative progress or accountability. **Conspicuous Omissions:** There is virtually no coverage of the specific conditions or terms of the 5.75% interest rate impact on small business debt, nor is there critical analysis of the long-term environmental impact of the Niš gas plant.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

Serbia portrays itself as a principled and historical power navigating a chaotic world.

COUNTRIES and LEADERS

- **Azerbaijan / Ilham Aliyev:** Portrayed as the "Ideal Friend." Aliyev is framed as strong, stable, and [unwavering in support](#) for Serbia's sovereignty. Quote: "Serbia and Azerbaijan are two friendly nations and stand shoulder to shoulder."
- **USA / Marco Rubio:** Characterized as a "Pragmatic Realist." He is framed as someone who [recognizes Serbia's preparedness](#) for the future compared to other Balkan states. Quote: "Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania are much better prepared for membership in the EU."
- **Russia:** Framed as a "Persistent Force." While the Ukraine war is covered with a sense of "inevitable tragedy," Russian military [advances on the front](#) are reported factually, without the moralizing tone found in Western media.
- **EU / Brussels:** Portrayed as "Inept and Demanding." The EU is framed as a body that is "not convinced" or "not ready" for its own enlargement, justifying Serbia's [diversification of alliances](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The day's reporting constitutes a massive **narrative seeding** operation aimed at reinforcing state legitimacy. By saturating the airwaves with images of Aliyev, the 1804 uprising, and the "Burj Khalifa" lit in Serbian colors, the state is engaging in "Pride-Based Pacification." The goal is to distract from the 5.75% interest rate and agrarian unrest by

making the citizen feel like part of a "rising global power." The delta between "media spin" and ground truth is widest in the agricultural sector, where the "prosperous Serbia" of the Expo 2027 narrative clashes with the [debt-ridden reality](#) of the Ibarska blockades.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- The Azerbaijan gas deal is a precursor to a **full decoupling** from Russian energy dependency, disguised as "diversification" to avoid offending Moscow while satisfying EU green energy criteria.
- The government will likely offer **minor concessions** to the dairy farmers (e.g., symbolic prelevmani) to prevent the protests from merging with the Kragujevac student movement before the spring election cycle.
- Peace negotiations in **Geneva** regarding Ukraine are likely further along than publicly admitted, with Serbia positioning itself as a "reconstruction hub" for the post-war era.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect heightened police monitoring of agricultural blockades and a media blitz focused on "investigative reports" discrediting protest leaders as politically motivated. Initial [traffic safety](#) crackdowns on heavy vehicles may be used as a tool of regulatory pressure against protesting farmers.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The establishment of direct [Belgrade-Baku flights](#) will lead to a surge in Azerbaijani investment in Serbian real estate and

telecommunications. The NBS reference rate is unlikely to drop below 5.5% as global "geopolitical shocks" continue to pressure the Dinar.

Long Term (1-5 Years): The completion of the Niš gas plant and the Prijepolje data centers will transform Southern Serbia into a **technological frontier**, potentially reversing the youth brain drain if the state can successfully integrate these projects into the national education system.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Risk:** Agrarian Collapse and Rural Revolt. **Triggers:** Sustained low milk prices and failure to implement prelevmani. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Severe political instability and food supply chain disruption. **Mitigations:** Targeted subsidies and a media focus on "model farmers" [like Zoran Živković](#).
- **Risk:** Regional Escalation via KLA Trial Fallout. **Triggers:** Harsh sentences for KLA leaders leading to unrest in Kosovo. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Border tensions and NATO intervention. **Mitigations:** Continued [diplomatic coordination](#) with Azerbaijan and other non-recognizers.
- **Risk:** Energy Infrastructure Sabotage. **Triggers:** Expansion of the Ukraine war into energy transit corridors. **Likelihood:** Low. **Impact:** Immediate economic paralysis. **Mitigations:** Diversified [import routes](#) via the Southern Gas Corridor.
- **Risk:** Debt Default for Small Producers. **Triggers:** NBS interest rates staying at [5.75%](#) for another year. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Contagion in the local banking sector. **Mitigations:** State-backed loan restructuring programs.

- **Risk:** Information Fatigue and "Unity" Narrative Collapse. **Triggers:** Failure of the Expo 2027 projects to deliver immediate jobs. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Mass civil unrest and loss of government mandate. **Mitigations:** High-visibility [ceremonial displays](#) and foreign leader visits.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The broadcasts fail to explain the **exact financing terms** of the Niš gas plant—is it a loan, an equity share by SOCAR, or state-funded?
- The "success" of the [117.4 exchange rate](#) is presented without acknowledging the massive central bank interventions required to maintain it.
- There is no mention of **opposition political parties** or their stances on the Aliyev visit, creating a false sense of national consensus.
- The medical segment on **childhood cancer** ([Nurdor](#)) hints at the "limit of financial resources" for families, a major blind spot in the narrative of overall national wealth.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Potemkin Sovereignty" Scenario: The high-profile Aliyev visit and the gas plant are not signs of strength, but a desperate attempt to find a new patron as Russia becomes a liability and the EU remains closed. The "16-fold trade increase" is an accounting gimmick based on a near-zero starting point in 2012, masking a lack of genuine industrial growth. **Black Swan:** A sudden regime change or internal instability in Azerbaijan could

instantly collapse Serbia's new energy pillar, leading to a winter blackout crisis.

The "Rubio Realignment" Scenario: The state is over-investing in the hope that a future US administration under figures like [Marco Rubio](#) will protect Serbian interests. If Washington instead pivots to a hardline pro-Kosovo stance under the same "nationalist" logic, Serbia will find itself isolated from both the EU and its new American "friends."

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Accelerate the [data center infrastructure](#) projects to provide high-value employment for the Kragujevac students before their protests evolve into a permanent political movement.
- Utilize the Azerbaijan relationship to mediate in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, positioning Belgrade as a "Geneva of the Balkans."
- Immediately implement a ["Trade Margin Ceiling"](#) on basic dairy products to placate farmers while reducing urban inflation.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Risk:** Diversify logistics routes away from the [Ibarska highway](#) during the ongoing tractor blockades to avoid significant delays in agricultural and industrial delivery.
- **Energy Opportunity:** Position capital for ancillary services (maintenance, construction, IT) related to the [Niš gas plant](#) and upcoming Expo 2027 infrastructure.

- **Regulatory Compliance:** Prepare for stricter traffic and environmental audits as the state attempts to use [regulatory enforcement](#) to regain control of the public space from protesters.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The reporting day focused on the symbolic weight of the 1835 Sretenje Constitution and the contemporary implementation of strategic bilateral treaties and trade regulations.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**
 - **Regulation on Trade Margins:** Discussed as a tool to control food prices; set to expire on March 1, 2026, creating market anxiety about potential price spikes.
 - **Agricultural Prelevmani (Proposed):** Demanded by dairy farmers to protect domestic markets from EU imports.
 - **The Sretenje Constitution of 1835:** Analyzed as the historical precursor to modern Serbian [freedom and statehood](#).
- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**
 - **Vučić-Aliyev Joint Press Conference:** Focused on the signing of [seven bilateral agreements](#) and the strategic energy roadmap.
 - **Munich Security Conference:** Statements by Marco Rubio and European leaders regarding the [future of Ukrainian security](#).
 - **NBS Executive Board Meeting:** Confirmed the retention of the [5.75% interest rate](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Statehood Day Celebrations:** Nation-wide events marking 222 years since the 1804 Uprising and the 1835 Sretenje Constitution. Key ceremonies in [Orašac and Kragujevac](#).
- **Azerbaijani President's Visit:** Ilham Aliyev arrives in Belgrade for a strategic summit, signing agreements on energy, food security, and culture. Proposes a [Niš gas plant](#).
- **Munich Security Conference Highlights:** Marco Rubio and European leaders discuss the [long-term security architecture](#) for Ukraine and the Western Balkans.
- **Farmers' Highway Blockade:** Dairy producers block the [Ibarska highway in Mrčajevci](#) for the fifth day, demanding state intervention in milk pricing.
- **International Childhood Cancer Day:** Nurdor organizes events in 38 cities to support families and children fighting cancer under the slogan "[Ja se borim](#)".
- **Student Protest in Kragujevac:** Symbolic "Sretnimo se ponovo" gathering of students and citizens [honoring the Novi Sad victims](#) and demanding constitutional respect.
- **The Hague KLA Trials:** Final words in the trial of [Hashim Thaçi and others](#), with the prosecution seeking 45-year sentences for war crimes.
- **Central Bank Update:** National Bank of Serbia maintains the reference interest rate at [5.75%](#) amid geopolitical volatility.
- **Weather Return of Winter:** Forecast predicts heavy snow in mountains and rain/sleet in lower regions, potentially impacting [agricultural sowing schedules](#).

- **Sombor Book Drive:** Karlo Bijelicki library organizes a donation drive for [children's and seniors' homes](#).
- **Diabetes and Athleticism:** Feature on [Jovana Živić and Stevan Stejić](#) managing diabetes through marathon running and nutrition education.
- **The Selmanović Goats:** A light human-interest story about a household in [Pope](#) celebrating the birth of five goats to one mother.
- **French Cinema Trends:** Reports on the "Guru" thriller and the [Angelina Jolie film "Stitches"](#) being filmed in Paris during fashion week.
- **Iranian Director's Struggle:** Jafar Panahi's legal challenges and [clandestine filmmaking](#) highlighted in the context of international film festivals.
- **Stepanov Vineyard Success:** Feature on a family vineyard in [Idoš](#) that expanded from 2,000 to 10,000 liters annually, winning Vojvodina quality awards.
- **Traffic Safety Enforcement:** Police intensifies checks on [professional drivers](#), reporting high rates of alcohol and psychoactive substance violations.

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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