

# TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

## RTS1

FEBRUARY 17, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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## SERBIA PIVOTS TO EASTERN TECH SOVEREIGNTY AMIDST KOSOVO'S INSTITUTIONAL ERASURE AND GENEVA POWER PLAYS

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### DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The diplomatic and security landscape for February 17, 2026, is defined by a sharp divergence between Serbia's high-tech aspirations and the deteriorating ground reality in Kosovo. President Aleksandar Vučić is leveraging a high-profile visit to India for the AI Impact Summit to position Serbia as a regional leader in **digital transformation** and artificial intelligence. This "Eastward pivot" seeks to secure tech sovereignty and economic growth through non-Western partnerships, even as the state's domestic attention is pulled toward a multi-front crisis involving agricultural strikes, severe winter weather, and escalating civil unrest in Novi Sad.

Simultaneously, the 18th anniversary of Kosovo's declaration of independence has become a flashpoint for "administrative lawfare." Pristina is moving to implement laws on foreigners and vehicles that Serbian officials and analysts warn will effectively **de-**

**institutionalize** the Serbian community by making it impossible for doctors and professors from central Serbia to operate. In the broader geopolitical arena, Geneva has emerged as the center of gravity for transactional diplomacy, with trilateral talks on Ukraine and indirect negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program proceeding under intense pressure from a second Trump administration, which favors rapid, often coercive, deal-making over protracted multilateralism.

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## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **The Indian Pivot and Tech Sovereignty:** President Vučić's visit to New Delhi highlights a strategic bet on [AI and supercomputing](#) as the next drivers of Serbian GDP.
  - Commitments to expanding the Kragujevac data center and integrating AI into state infrastructure.
  - Emphasis on India as an "unwavering supporter" of Serbian territorial integrity.
- **Administrative Squeeze in Kosovo:** The implementation of "Law on Foreigners" is framed as a tool for [systemic ethnic cleansing](#) by targeting Serbian health and education staff.
  - Threats to the University of Pristina (in Mitrovica) due to residency restrictions for staff from central Serbia.
  - Continued pressure from the abolition of the Serbian Dinar and closure of Serbian-run institutions.

- **Geneva Trilateral and the "Trump Effect":** Intensive diplomatic efforts in Geneva are characterized by [coercive mediation](#) from the United States regarding the Ukraine conflict.
  - Pressure on Kyiv to accept territorial concessions (potentially 20% of Donetsk) for an immediate ceasefire.
  - Parallel indirect talks between the US and Iran mediated by Oman, punctuated by Iranian naval exercises and threats to the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Domestic Social Instability:** Clashes in Novi Sad and ongoing agricultural blockades signal [internal friction](#) between the state and various interest groups.
  - Violent protests outside the Serbian National Theater during the Matica Srpska bicentennial.
  - Agricultural strikes (dairy and vegetable farmers) paralyzing key transit routes like the Ibarska Magistrala.
- **Energy Ownership Shifts:** Negotiations for the [sale of Russian shares](#) in NIS (Naftna Industrija Srbije) to Hungary's MOL highlight the ongoing reconfiguration of regional energy security.

## KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

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**Armed Conflict & Militarization:** The Ukraine theater remains active with massive Russian strikes on [Odesa's energy infrastructure](#), while Iran has escalated tensions by closing the **Strait of Hormuz** during military exercises involving live ammunition. In Geneva, the US administration is reportedly leveraging military aid to force Kyiv into a trilateral peace deal, emphasizing "strength through deal-making."

**Diplomacy & Statecraft:** Serbia is pursuing a "Multipolar 2.0" strategy, deepening ties with Greece (medical faculty agreements and gas pipeline cooperation) and India, while navigating a highly transactional relationship with Washington. Prime Minister **Đuro Macut** is playing a secondary role, focusing on [regional European cooperation](#) and academic mobility, while Vučić handles high-level geopolitical positioning.

**Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk:** The primary governance risk identified is "regulatory lawfare" in Kosovo. By applying **Zakon o strancima** (Law on Foreigners) to Serbian nationals, Pristina is creating a legal environment that criminalizes the presence of Serbian state employees, effectively forcing a [legal exodus](#) of the professional class.

**Tech Sovereignty & AI:** Leadership has identified AI as a "civilizational revolution" that Serbia cannot afford to miss. The focus is on [infrastructure independence](#), including supercomputers in Kragujevac that can provide heating for the city while processing state data, signaling a move toward dual-use critical infrastructure.

## DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

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**Institutional Defense vs. Revolutionary Change:** A core narrative of the day is the defense of traditional Serbian pillars (Matica Srpska, the Church) against what the government calls "anti-state" blockaders, contrasted with the push for [hyper-modernization](#) through AI. This creates a cognitive dissonance in state messaging: holding onto the 19th-century cultural identity while racing toward a 21st-century digital economy.

### **The Weaponization of Administrative Law:**

In Kosovo, the trend is moving away from kinetic violence toward **administrative erasure**. By targeting the "mobility" of doctors and teachers, the Pristina government is targeting the [viability of Serbian life](#) without needing to fire a shot. This "soft" ethnic cleansing is harder for international monitors to quantify but equally effective in its outcome.

**Energy Realpolitik:** The potential divestment of Russian interests in NIS to MOL (Hungary) indicates a **regionalization of energy assets**. This suggests that Serbia and Hungary are forming a tighter energy bloc to mitigate the risks of US sanctions on Russian entities and the potential loss of Ukrainian transit routes.

## **INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY**

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Serbia is experiencing significant internal friction. The protests in Novi Sad are particularly notable as they targeted the **Matica Srpska**, a foundational cultural institution. Government officials, including Ana Brnabić and Miloš Vučević, have framed these protests as a [betrayal of national values](#), comparing the scenes to the chaos of 1945. This rhetoric suggests a growing intolerance for dissent, which is being equated with "anti-state" activity.

- **Agricultural Unrest:** Dairy farmers are entering their [seventh day of blockades](#), dissatisfied with state measures and market conditions for milk. The government's failure to reach a deal with all but the vegetable farmers indicates a fracturing of the rural support base.

- **Institutional Decay:** Reported scams targeting retirees by individuals posing as **VMA doctors** for home visits suggest a breakdown in public trust and safety, particularly for the most vulnerable demographics.
- **Climate Stress:** Severe snow has caused [power grid failures](#) in Valjevo, Bajina Bašta, and Čajetina, exposing vulnerabilities in rural infrastructure despite the state's "supercomputer" aspirations.

## **EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE**

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Serbia's global posture is currently defined by **opportunistic multipolarity**. By engaging India on AI, Vučić is signaling that Serbia has alternatives to EU-centric tech development. This is a defensive maneuver against potential Western pressure, seeking to anchor Serbian interests in the "Global South's" rising tech powers.

- **The US-Russia-Ukraine Triangle:** Belgrade is carefully watching the Geneva talks. The [US pressure on Kyiv](#) to accept a kompromis (compromise) is seen as a potential template for a forced settlement in Kosovo. However, the Serbian state remains officially "unwavering" in its refusal to recognize Kosovo, even as it engages in trilateral diplomacy.
- **Greece as a Gateway:** The deepening relationship with Athens (academic agreements, LNG pipeline potential) suggests Serbia is looking for a **secure Southern corridor** for energy and talent to bypass the increasingly unstable Northern and Western routes.

## THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

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The economic outlook is characterized by heavy state investment in infrastructure and a precarious energy situation linked to foreign policy shifts. The NIS license renewal is a **critical deadline** with significant implications for domestic fuel supply.

- **Critical Energy Milestone:** The license for NIS [expires this Friday](#). Minister Đedović Handanović is awaiting a decision from the US administration regarding the extension, highlighting Serbia's high level of regulatory dependency on Washington.
- **Infrastructure Spend:** Construction for **Expo 2027** and the **Belgrade Metro** is moving into an "intensive phase." The state expects Expo to attract over [4 million visitors](#), with a projected 8,000 events over 90 days.
- **Reserves:** Fuel reserves are currently stated at **220,000 tons of diesel**, 38,000 tons of gasoline, and 55,000 tons of mazut, which the state claims is "sufficient," though market anxiety remains high.

## LEADERSHIP CHANGES

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Personnel shifts and factional dynamics reflect a government consolidating power around a tech-focused and security-heavy core.

- **Đuro Macut:** Appearing as the **Premier of Serbia**, he is leading the diplomatic outreach in Greece, signaling a division of labor where the Presidency handles "Global Strategy" and the Premier handles "European Implementation."

- **Ana Brnabić:** As Speaker of the National Assembly, she is taking an **aggressive stance** against domestic protestors, framing civil unrest as a direct attack on the pillars of the state.
- **Dalibor Marković "Palma":** Rebranding his father's "Palma" legacy as [economic nationalism](#) and "national pragmatism," indicating a continuation of local populist power structures within the national framework.

## EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

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The state-aligned editorial posture is **Nationalistic-Modernist**. The "Lead Stories" are almost exclusively focused on the President's international successes (India) and the "sacredness" of national institutions under threat from "hooligans." Domestic crises like the agricultural blockades and energy grid failures are addressed as "technical challenges" being efficiently managed by ministers.

**Buried Stories:** The actual terms of the NIS-MOL negotiations are kept vague, as is the specific nature of the "compromises" being discussed in Geneva that might affect Serbian territorial policy. There is a **conspicuous omission** of any critical analysis regarding the environmental or social impact of the rapid Expo 2027/Metro construction on local Belgrade residents.

## GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

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The news portrays a world of "Big Deals" and "Administrative Aggression," where small

states must be technologically advanced to survive.

- **United States (Trump Administration):** Portrayed as a [dominant, transactional force](#) that can "force" peace or destroy regimes with a stroke of a pen. "Trump expects productive talks; everything boils down to the hardest question: territories."
- **India:** Framed as a **principled friend** and a tech peer. "India has been unwavering in its support for the territorial integrity of Serbia."
- **Kosovo (Kurti):** Characterized as a **repressive regime** conducting "administrative terror." "The terror of temporary institutions in Pristina... does not stop."
- **Iran:** Portrayed as a **tough but 'bad' negotiator** that understands only force or naval brinkmanship. "Iran is a tough negotiator... better to reach an agreement than send the army."

## INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

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The state is actively seeding a "Meta-Narrative" that links domestic protests directly to foreign-backed efforts to weaken Serbia's position in Kosovo. By labeling student and student-led blockades as ["struggle against Serbia,"](#) the government is attempting to delegitimize any criticism of the state's direction. Simultaneously, the focus on "AI Revolution" acts as a **technological distraction**, promising a utopian future to offset the immediate hardships of inflation and territorial loss.

## HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

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- **Institutional Collapse in Kosovo:** If the Law on Foreigners is strictly implemented by March 15, expect a [mass resignation/exodus](#) of Serbian professionals from Mitrovica, leading to a collapse of the Serbian health and education systems in the region.
- **The "MOL-ization" of NIS:** Gazprom will likely divest its majority stake to Hungary's MOL by March, allowing the company to **bypass US sanctions** and securing the license renewal from Washington.
- **Geneva Peace Framework:** Trump-mediated talks will likely produce a "frozen" conflict in Ukraine by late spring, which will then be used as **precedent** to pressure Belgrade into a "final" administrative agreement with Pristina.

## STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

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**Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Possible escalation of police interventions in Novi Sad and Belgrade; a "last-minute" extension of the NIS license by US authorities as ownership talks progress.

**Medium Term (1-6 Months):** Implementation of the "Geneva Format" ceasefire in Ukraine, causing a diplomatic earthquake in the Balkans as Serbia navigates the new "Territory for Peace" reality.

**Long Term (1-5 Years):** Completion of Expo 2027 and the first Metro line will solidify Belgrade as a **regional logistics hub**, but the social cost may be a deeply polarized society with a tech-elite urban center and a neglected, strike-prone rural periphery.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

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- **Systemic Institutional Failure in Kosovo:** The targeting of Serbian doctors and professors creates a vacuum of basic services. **Triggers:** Mass arrests or deportations of "illegal" staff after March 15. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Catastrophic for Serbian survival in the pokrajina. **Mitigation:** International academic and medical "neutrality" status for the University and Hospital.
- **Energy Supply Disruption:** Failure to renew the NIS license or a breakdown in gas transit. **Triggers:** Hardline US sanction enforcement; Ukrainian sabotage of pipelines. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Economic paralysis. **Mitigation:** Accelerated sale to MOL and LNG through Greece.
- **Domestic Civil Unrest:** Escalation of protests in Novi Sad into a broader anti-government movement. **Triggers:** Deaths or serious injuries during police crackdowns on student blockades. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Erosion of state authority and investor confidence. **Mitigation:** Resumption of dialogue with agricultural and student groups.
- **Hormuz Strait Energy Shock:** Continued Iranian closure of the strait. **Triggers:** Failure of the Geneva indirect talks; Israeli or US air strikes on Iranian assets. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Global oil price spike, destroying Serbian inflation targets. **Mitigation:** Increasing strategic reserves and diversifying to non-Middle Eastern sources.

- **Forced Peace in Ukraine:** A settlement that leaves Russia in control of occupied territories. **Triggers:** US withdrawal of aid. **Likelihood:** High (under Trump administration framing). **Impact:** Moral and diplomatic pressure on Serbia regarding Kosovo. **Mitigation:** Strengthening the "Indian Pivot" and non-Western alliances.

## GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

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- **The "Macut" Prime Ministry:** The transcripts feature Đuro Macut as Premier, yet offer little detail on his rise to power or his relationship with the President's inner circle.
- **Russian Withdrawal Intentions:** While talks of MOL buying NIS are mentioned, the **actual Russian stance**—whether they are being forced out or are strategically retreating—is not explored.
- **Kosovo Armed Response:** There is significant coverage of "administrative terror" but almost no intelligence or reporting on the **potential for localized kinetic resistance** by Serbian populations in the North.
- **AI Feasibility:** The state promises a tech revolution, but the transcripts fail to address the **brain drain** of tech talent to Western Europe, which contradicts the "sovereignty" narrative.

## CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

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**The "Administrative Bluff":** Pristina's Law on Foreigners may not be intended for full implementation but as a **negotiating chip** to force the Association of Serbian Municipalities (ZSO) on their terms. If

Belgrade overreacts, it may fall into a trap that justifies KFOR intervention against "destabilizing" Serbian structures.

**The "Potemkin Tech" Scenario:** The India/AI pivot could be a **distraction for the urban elite** while the state quietly prepares for a managed retreat from Kosovo. By focusing on the "future," the government makes the "present" losses seem like relics of an old, irrelevant era.

**Black Swan:** A sudden collapse of the Iranian regime during the Geneva talks leads to an anarchic power vacuum in the Persian Gulf, causing a total global energy blockade that makes current Serbian reserves irrelevant within 72 hours.

## RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

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### For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Formalize a **Bilateral Tech Treaty** with India to secure AI talent and hardware outside of the US/EU supply chain.
- Create an **emergency medical/educational digital platform** for Kosovo to allow remote operation of hospitals and schools if the physical staff is deported.
- Diversify the diplomatic corps to engage more heavily with "Transactionist" Republicans in the US to secure the NIS license before the Friday deadline.

### For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Logistics Opportunity:** The construction of the [Surčin-Obrenovac-Expo corridor](#) creates a long-term real estate and logistics opportunity in Western Belgrade.

- **Energy Risk:** Investors in NIS should prepare for a **revaluation** of the company as it transitions from Russian to Hungarian ownership.
- **Agri-Supply Chain:** Continued blockades on the Ibarska Magistrala necessitate **redundant supply routes** for fresh produce and dairy moving into Belgrade.

## LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

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Legislative activity is currently dominated by Kosovo's administrative offensive and Serbian attempts to harmonize university mobility with international standards.

### • BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Zakon o strancima (Kosovo):** Regulates residency for non-Kosovo document holders; being used to target Serbian staff.
- **Zakon o vozilima (Kosovo):** Mandates registration of vehicles under Pristina's system, ending the use of "KM" plates.
- **Zakon o Visokom Obrazovanju (Serbia):** Amendments to define [academic mobility](#) as a prerequisite for career advancement, aiming to align Serbian universities with the EHEA.

### • HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Vučić Instagram Statements:** Used as primary source for foreign policy doctrine regarding India and Matica Srpska.
- **Ministry of Mining & Energy Presser:** Dubravka Đedović Handanović confirming the [critical NIS license deadline](#).
- **Novi Sad Prosecution Release:** Qualifying protests as "violent behavior at a public gathering," signaling **judicial escalation**.

## KEY STORIES

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- **Vučić in New Delhi:** President Aleksandar Vučić arrives in India for the AI Impact Summit, meets with President Murmu and PM Modi, and writes for the Indian Express. Highlights AI as a key to Serbia's future growth ([5:00pm](#)).
- **Kosovo Independence Anniversary:** Pristina celebrates 18 years of independence while Serbian officials warn of "administrative ethnic cleansing" through foreigner and vehicle laws ([10:30pm](#)).
- **Geneva Trilateral Talks:** Trilateral negotiations between Russia, Ukraine, and the US (with Trump representatives) begin in Geneva. Trump pressures Ukraine to accept a "kompromis" ([11:00pm](#)).
- **Iran Indirect Negotiations:** US and Iran hold indirect talks in Geneva via Oman. Iran conducts naval drills and closes the Strait of Hormuz ([11:00pm](#)).
- **Novi Sad Protests:** Clashes between students and police outside the Serbian National Theater during the 200th-anniversary celebration of Matica Srpska. Government condemns the "attack on state pillars" ([5:30pm](#)).
- **Agricultural Blockades:** Dairy farmers continue blocking the Ibarska Magistrala at Mrčajevci for a seventh day. Vegetable farmers reach a deal with the Ministry, but dairy farmers remain on the streets ([8:00am](#)).
- **NIS Sale to MOL:** Negotiations reported between Gazprom Neft and MOL (Hungary) for the purchase of Russian shares in Serbia's oil industry ([5:00pm](#)).
- **NIS License Deadline:** Minister Đedović Handanović states that the NIS operating license expires this Friday and awaits a US decision on extension ([9:30pm](#)).
- **Azerbaijan Gas Investment:** Announcement that Azerbaijan-backed gas power plants will increase Serbian electricity production by 6% ([9:30pm](#)).
- **Winter Weather Crisis:** Heavy snow (up to 40cm on Kopaoniku and Javoru) causes power grid failures and traffic chaos across Western Serbia ([11:00pm](#)).
- **Expo 2027 Construction:** Update on construction at the Expo site and the Belgrade Metro, including plans for new bridges and international cruise ship arrivals ([6:00pm](#)).
- **Medical Faculty Cooperation:** PM Đuro Macut oversees an agreement between Belgrade and Athens medical faculties to boost quality and mobility ([8:00am](#)).
- **VMA Impersonation Scams:** Police warning regarding scammers in Novi Beograd posing as VMA doctors to enter the homes of retirees ([9:00pm](#)).
- **Matica Srpska Bicentennial:** Sombor and Novi Sad celebrate the anniversary of the oldest Serbian cultural institution ([5:00pm](#)).
- **Beneficiary Work Experience:** Discussion on expanding the list of professions with "beneficirani radni staž" (hazardous work benefits), including firefighters, police, and miners ([8:30am](#)).
- **Kopaonik Ski Record:** Record attendance at Kopaonik ski resort with 30,000 guests, one-third more than last year, despite severe weather ([11:00pm](#)).

## 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). To learn more or subscribe to our free daily newsletters, visit <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/announcing-our-new-daily-todays-trends-on-capitol-hill-todays-media-trends-newsletter-briefings/>. 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>.