

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

RTS1

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

SERBIA'S STRATEGIC PIVOT: TECH ALLIANCES & ENERGY DIVERSIFICATION vs. DOMESTIC UNREST & SECURITY PRESSURES

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE: FEBRUARY 18, 2026

Serbia pursues aggressive external modernization in AI and energy to counter severe internal crises in agriculture, infrastructure, and healthcare, alongside regional security challenges.

DUAL-TRACK STRATEGY: ABROAD vs. AT HOME

EXTERNAL: TECH & ENERGY SOVEREIGNTY

THE "NEW DELHI PIVOT" & AI AMBITIONS



Vučić-Modi Summit: Strategic partnership for "AI Sovereignty" & Defense. **Goal:** Secure advanced computing infrastructure, boost national competitiveness, participate in Expo 2027. **Narrative:** Leapfrogging internal failures via high-tech foreign investment.

ENERGY GEOPOLITICS & DIVERSIFICATION



NIS License Crisis: Shifting away from EU-aligned grids due to Croatian transit block. Exploring ownership shift to Hungarian/Azerbaijani interests to bypass Western sanctions & secure supply.

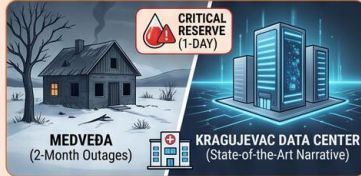
INTERNAL: CRISIS MANAGEMENT & DECAY

AGRICULTURAL REVOLT & "ANTI-MILK" NARRATIVE



Deadlock with Dairy Producers: Failed negotiations, persistent roadblocks. Government frames protests as "anti-milk propaganda" while small farmers face bankruptcy from cheap imports & high costs.

INFRASTRUCTURE FAILURES & PUBLIC SECTOR STRESS



Systemic Neglect vs. High-Tech Image: Prolonged rural power outages contrast with data center hype. Healthcare strain evident in critical blood shortages. Basic mandates under severe stress.

REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS & NARRATIVES



KOSOVO 18th ANNIVERSARY
Belgrade frames as "international lawlessness" & "Pandora's box".



PERCEIVED REGIONAL MILITARY ALLIANCE
Rhetoric of a new alliance targeting Serbia heightens defensive posture.

RISK ASSESSMENT, FORESIGHT & IMPLICATIONS

ACUTE RISKS & TRIGGERS

RISK	TRIGGER	IMPACT
ENERGY GRID INSTABILITY	Severe weather, neglect	Economic disruption, civil unrest.
AGRICULTURAL COLLAPSE	Import flooding, high costs	Long-term food insecurity, rural depopulation.
NIS SUPPLY CHAIN BREAK	Croatian transit halt	Fuel rationing, hyperinflation.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT (SHORT TO LONG TERM)

SHORT (1-4 WEEKS):
NIS Deadline Crisis or Diplomatic Breakthrough. Localized Food Shortages.

MEDIUM (1-6 MONTHS):
Azerbaijani Gas Plant Starts. Potential Gov. Reshuffle ahead of Elections.

LONG (1-5 YEARS):
Potential "Non-Aligned Tech Hub" detached from EU standards. Kosovo remains frozen conflict.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

STATE: Prioritize rural infrastructure restoration. Seek trilateral oil transit deal. Formalize AI ethics.
INVESTORS: Diversify agri-supply chains. Monitor Data Center opportunities. Invest in private energy resilience.

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SERBIA LEVERAGES STRATEGIC
TECH ALLIANCES AND ENERGY
DIVERSIFICATION TO OFFSET
MOUNTING DOMESTIC
AGRICULTURAL UNREST AND
REGIONAL SECURITY PRESSURES.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

On February 18, 2026, the Serbian state narrative centered on a dual-track strategy of aggressive technological modernization abroad and reactive crisis management at home. President Aleksandar Vučić's high-profile summit in New Delhi underscored a pivot toward **AI sovereignty** and strategic partnerships with India to secure advanced computing infrastructure, which the state frames as essential for future national competitiveness and healthcare efficiency. Simultaneously, the administration is navigating a deepening domestic crisis in the agricultural sector, characterized by failed negotiations with dairy producers and persistent roadblocks on the Ibarska highway. The government's posture suggests an attempt to frame these protests as politically motivated "anti-milk propaganda" while

failing to resolve the fundamental economic grievances of rural producers.

Geopolitically, the day is marked by the 18th anniversary of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, which Belgrade continues to weaponize as a narrative of international lawlessness and "Pandora's box" of regional instability. This rhetoric coincides with reports of a new regional military alliance purportedly targeting Serbia, heightening the state's defensive posture. Meanwhile, the energy sector faces a critical juncture: the operational license for **NIS** (Petroleum Industry of Serbia) is nearing expiration, and a geopolitical tug-of-war persists over Russian oil transit through the Croatian **Janaf** pipeline versus the Hungarian **Druzhba** route. The administration is signaling a potential shift in NIS ownership toward Hungarian or Azerbaijani interests as a means of securing supply chain resilience against Western sanctions.

Domestically, systemic institutional decay is surfacing in reports of prolonged infrastructure failures, notably in the Medveđa region, where some citizens have remained without electricity for up to two months. This contrasts sharply with the state's state-of-the-art "Data Center" narrative in Kragujevac. The confluence of these events—technological aspiration, agricultural revolt, and infrastructure neglect—suggests a government attempting to leapfrog its internal development failures by securing high-tech foreign investment, even as its traditional domestic mandates in energy and food security face severe stress.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The most significant overarching developments of the day include:

- **Strategic AI and Defense Alignment with India:** President Vučić's visit to New Delhi focused on bilateral cooperation in [artificial intelligence and defense](#), positioning India as a critical partner for Serbia's technological sovereignty and a key participant in the upcoming Expo 2027.
- **Agricultural Sector Deadlock and Civil Disobedience:** Negotiations between the Ministry of Agriculture and dairy associations [concluded without agreement](#), leading to the continuation of tractor roadblocks and an escalating rhetoric regarding "anti-milk propaganda" and unfair import practices.
- **Energy Transit Crisis and NIS Ownership Uncertainty:** With the NIS operating license [expiring on February 20](#), Belgrade is exploring diversification via Azerbaijani gas and navigating the Croatian refusal to transport Russian oil via the Janaf pipeline.
- **Regional Security Rhetoric on Kosovo Anniversary:** On the 18th anniversary of Kosovo's independence, the Serbian leadership characterized the event as a [defeat of international law](#) and warned of a developing regional military alliance directed at Serbia.
- **Infrastructure and Public Health Stress:** Significant reports of [two-month power outages](#) in Medveđa and a [critical one-day reserve](#) at the Institute for Blood Transfusion indicate severe strain on basic state services.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization:

- The state claims a [new military alliance](#) is being formed in the region to isolate Serbia, while concurrently seeking deeper [defense industry cooperation](#) with India to ensure Serbian munitions factories remain at capacity.
- Increased Russian strikes on Ukrainian [energy infrastructure](#) are reported, while Geneva-based trilateral talks under U.S. pressure continue to seek a "quick" end to the conflict.

Tech Sovereignty & AI:

- The Kragujevac Data Center is highlighted as a [state-of-the-art](#) facility, with plans to integrate French-made supercomputers by year-end to accelerate medical diagnostics and industrial AI applications.
- Vučić frames [AI development](#) as a non-negotiable chance for Serbia to exceed the growth of Eastern European neighbors.

Energy & Critical Minerals:

- Serbia is negotiating a [6% increase in electricity production](#) through a new Azerbaijani-funded gas power plant in Niš.
- The refusal of the Croatian pipeline operator **Janaf** to [transport Russian oil](#) for the NIS refinery in Pančevo remains a central strategic hurdle.

Food & Water Security:

- Domestic fruit prices have surged by [68% in one year](#), driven by poor harvests and the closure of the Russian market for Serbian exports.

- The dairy industry faces a [20% drop in consumption](#), which the Ministry of Agriculture blames on media campaigns, while farmers demand immediate import bans.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of Technology for Political Legitimacy

The Serbian administration is heavily leaning into a narrative of "AI-driven salvation." By highlighting data centers and supercomputers, the state attempts to project an image of a **technologically sovereign** nation. This serves two purposes: first, to signal to the EU and global investors that Serbia is an indispensable tech hub; second, to distract from the archaic state of its rural infrastructure. The specific promise that AI will reduce MRI wait times from [weeks to minutes](#) is a potent populist message designed to bridge the gap between high-tech investment and tangible citizen benefits.

Agricultural Protectionism vs. Global Market Realities

A significant friction exists between the government's market-driven rhetoric and the agricultural sector's survivalist demands. The Minister of Agriculture's refusal to [ban EU imports](#) is grounded in the fear of retaliatory bans on Serbian exports, yet the domestic dairy market is being cannibalized by cheaper European products. The state's strategy involves discrediting protest leaders by labeling them "political actors" while ignoring the structural disadvantages faced by small producers who [lack the scale](#) to compete with subsidized Bavarian dairy farms.

Energy Strategic Pivoting

Serbia's energy sector is currently a hostage to geography and sanctions. The reliance on the **Janaf** pipeline through Croatia is now a critical vulnerability, leading to discussions about [Azerbaijan's "Socar"](#) taking a larger role or even a full ownership shift of NIS to Hungarian interests. This reflects a broader trend of Serbia seeking to bypass Western-aligned infrastructure in favor of a "Eurasian corridor" that includes Russia, Hungary, and Azerbaijan.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Elite Infighting and Factionalism: Rumors of a [government reshuffle](#) initiated by "Premijer Macut" suggest internal dissatisfaction with the performance of certain ministers, particularly regarding the handling of the agriculture crisis. Opposition figures like Radomir Lazović are [actively challenging](#) the legitimacy of voter lists and state media framing, indicating a highly polarized political environment ahead of potential early elections.

Rural Disillusionment: The contrast between the state's technological aspirations and the reality of rural Serbia is stark. In Medveđa, the failure to restore power for [two months](#) after a storm, combined with unadjusted electricity bills, has created a sense of abandonment. This is compounded by the [shortening of bus lines](#) to villages like Sakule and Farkaždin, which effectively isolates rural workers and students from metropolitan economic centers.

Healthcare System Strain: The Institute for Blood Transfusion's [one-day reserve](#) is a major indicator of a system operating at the edge of failure. While the state promotes AI-enabled diagnostics, the basic supply of blood

for surgery and cancer treatment is insecure, reflecting a failure of public engagement or logistical management.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The "New Delhi Pivot": Serbia is framing India not just as a trade partner, but as a [geopolitical anchor](#) that respects territorial integrity—a clear jab at Western powers. This relationship is being weaponized to show that Serbia has alternatives to EU integration, especially in critical sectors like AI and defense manufacturing.

Sanctions Evasion and Energy Sovereignty: The ongoing dispute over Russian oil transit shows Serbia actively testing the limits of EU sanctions regimes. The framing of Croatia as [anti-Russian and anti-Serbian](#) in its pipeline management serves to unify the domestic public against regional neighbors while justifying a strategic shift toward Orban's Hungary and Aliyev's Azerbaijan.

Ukraine/Russia Mediation Narratives: Serbian media provides significant coverage to [trilateral peace talks](#) in Geneva, emphasizing "Trump-led" pressure for a quick settlement. This framing suggests Belgrade is banking on a shift in U.S. foreign policy to de-escalate the regional tensions that have pressured its own energy and trade ties with Russia.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Serbian economy is struggling with sectoral inflation and supply chain blockages,

despite government efforts to highlight high-tech investments.

- **Agricultural Inflation:** Fruit prices have increased by [68%](#); dairy consumption is down [20%](#) [due to cost and narrative factors](#).
- **Energy Costs:** Gas plant investments from Azerbaijan target a **6% increase** in national power output [to stabilize prices](#).
- **Fiscal Incentives:** The state is offering [zero-interest loans](#) for farmers under 40 and new subsidies for milk producers to quell unrest.
- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** Focus remains on [Indian investment](#) in the IT sector and military manufacturing.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Strategic personnel shifts and factional rumors indicate a government preparing for a transition or defensive consolidation.

- **Premijer Macut:** Reported to be [unhappy with ministerial performance](#) and considering a reshuffle to regain public trust.
- **Minister Dragan Glamočić:** Under intense fire from [dairy producers](#); his political survival depends on resolving the roadblock crisis without bowing to protectionist demands.
- **Radomir Lazović:** Emerging as the [primary opposition voice](#) in state media, challenging election integrity and state narratives on "social dialogue."

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The RTS1 broadcast hierarchy prioritizes state prestige and external threats to build national cohesion. Vučić's trip to India and the Kosovo anniversary are **Lead Stories**, framing the President as a global statesman and a defender of the nation. The **Agriculture Protests** are given significant airtime but are heavily filtered through the Ministry's perspective, framing the farmers as uncompromising or misled. **Buried Stories** include the specific failures in Medveđa and the full details of opposition claims regarding election fraud, which are minimized in favor of human interest segments like the Bunjevac culture or Antarctic tourism. The overall tone is one of "aspirational nationalism" mixed with "defensive alarmism" regarding regional neighbors.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The day's reporting reveals a consistent pattern of framing global actors based on their alignment with Serbian territorial and economic interests.

COUNTRIES

- **India:** Portrayed as a [principled, competent ally](#) and a technological titan. "Relationships... utemeljeni u snažnoj istoriji saradnje."
- **Croatia:** Framed as [hostile and obstructionist](#), weaponizing energy transit to punish Serbia. "Hrvatska politika... anti-ruska... anti-srpska."
- **Hungary:** Seen as a [pragmatic partner](#) in resisting EU-led energy sanctions. "Orban pokušava da sačuva svoju poziciju nezavisnog političara."

- **United States:** Portrayed as [domineering yet shifting](#), with expectations that a Trump administration would favor Serbian interests in Ukraine and energy. "Tramp želi dogovor što pre."

LEADERS

- **Aleksandar Vučić:** Framed as [visionary and tireless](#). "Ubrzani razvoj Srbije dosta zavisi od veštačke inteligencije."
- **Donald Trump:** Characterized as [decisive and pro-family](#) (in the context of school milk policies) and a disruptor of failed diplomatic status quos. "Trump... zakonski rešio i doneli su zakon o vraćanju mleka."
- **Volodymyr Zelensky:** Portrayed as [weakened and desperate](#), facing internal pressure for a referendum on peace terms.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Narrative Seeding:** The Ministry of Agriculture is seeding a narrative that dairy protests are driven by [anti-milk propaganda](#) and AI-generated misinformation, effectively poisoning the well for farmers' grievances.
- **State Censorship by Omission:** While power outages in Medveđa are mentioned, the **systemic neglect** of rural infrastructure is overshadowed by high-gloss reports on the Kragujevac Data Center.
- **Foreign Propaganda:** Extensive reporting on [Russian and Hungarian views](#) on energy transit presents a biased view of the Janaf dispute, omitting Croatia's legal obligations to EU sanctions.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Energy Fait Accompli:** Serbia will likely finalize a deal for [Azerbaijani or Hungarian investment](#) in NIS before the Feb 20 license expiration, presenting it as a move for national security rather than a sanctions-evasion tactic.
- **Agricultural Radicalization:** As negotiations remain stalled, dairy producers may move from roadblocks to [dumping milk](#) in city centers, potentially forcing a government reshuffle to sacrifice Minister Glamočić.
- **AI as Surveillance Backbone:** The rush to integrate [Indian and French technology](#) suggests that while healthcare efficiency is the public face, the underlying infrastructure will likely be used for enhanced state data control and population monitoring.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): The NIS operational deadline will trigger either a diplomatic breakthrough with Croatia or a [crisis in refinery output](#). Continued agricultural protests will likely lead to localized supply shortages in major cities.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): Implementation of the [Azerbaijani gas plant](#) project in Niš will begin, shifting Serbia's energy dependence away from traditional EU-integrated grids. A government reshuffle is likely to occur by May to preempt electoral losses.

Long Term (1-5 Years): If the India-Serbia tech alliance bears fruit, Belgrade could become a **non-aligned tech hub**,

increasingly decoupled from EU regulatory standards in AI and data privacy. Kosovo will remain a frozen conflict, used periodically to mobilize domestic support during economic downturns.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The following table outlines the most acute risks to Serbian national stability and regional posture:

- **Energy Grid Instability:** Risk of cascading failures in rural power infrastructure. **Triggers:** Severe weather events or lack of investment in the Medveđa-style aging grid. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Severe economic disruption and civil unrest. **Mitigations:** Immediate diversion of "Data Center" funds to regional maintenance.
- **Agricultural Collapse:** Bankruptcy of small dairy and fruit producers. **Triggers:** Continued failure to ban cheap imports and high fuel costs. **Likelihood:** Moderate-High. **Impact:** Long-term food insecurity and rural depopulation. **Mitigations:** Targeted subsidies and export diversification beyond Russia.
- **Regional Military Escalation:** Flashpoint over Kosovo border or regional military buildup. **Triggers:** Kosovo independence anniversary provocations or new regional alliance activity. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Halt to foreign investment and NATO intervention. **Mitigations:** Continued diplomacy with "balanced" powers like India.

- **NIS Supply Chain Break:** Total halt of oil transit through Croatia. **Triggers:** Croatian enforcement of stricter EU sanctions or Janaf contract expiration. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Fuel rationing and hyperinflation. **Mitigations:** Accelerated construction of the Hungary-Serbia pipeline connection.
- **Public Health Crisis:** Failure of the blood supply chain. **Triggers:** Continued low donation rates during winter flu/cold season. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Deaths among oncology and trauma patients. **Mitigations:** National mobilization campaign and mandatory corporate donation days.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts fail to detail the **environmental impact** of the proposed Niš gas plant and the Kragujevac data center's massive energy consumption.
- There is a lack of objective reporting on the **actual legality** of Janaf's refusal to transport Russian oil; the narrative is entirely emotional/political.
- The **youth unemployment** rate is not explicitly linked to the 70% of Kosovo Albanians wanting to leave, nor is there a comparable figure for Serbian youth.
- The "success" of lung cancer screening via AI is mentioned without **third-party verification** of the false-positive/negative rates.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The India Pivot as Stalling Tactic: While the government promotes high-tech cooperation with India, it may actually be a

cover for defense procurement from Russia or sanctioned entities using India as a third-party intermediary. The AI focus is a "shiny object" for the EU while the real work is securing hard military hardware.

The "Black Swan" Energy Collapse: If the NIS refinery license expires and Janaf remains closed, Serbia's economy could **collapse within 60 days**. This would lead to a total breakdown of the Vučić administration's mandate, potentially leading to emergency rule or a hard shift back toward total Russian dependence, ending all EU aspirations.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Prioritize the restoration of **rural energy infrastructure** to prevent the emergence of "neglected zones" that become hotbeds for radical opposition.
- Seek a **trilateral oil transit agreement** involving Hungary, Croatia, and the EU to secure NIS operations through the 2026/27 winter.
- Formalize AI ethics and data protection laws to ensure the [India-Serbia tech corridor](#) meets international standards for future market access.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Risk:** Diversify away from reliance on Serbian dairy or fruit exports until domestic price stability and market access issues are resolved.
- **Tech Opportunity:** Monitor the **Kragujevac Data Center** for potential co-location opportunities as supercomputing capacity comes online.

- **Energy Resilience:** Invest in **private off-grid power solutions** for industrial facilities in central and southern Serbia to hedge against regional grid failures.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative and policy activity focused on emergency economic stabilization and technological integration.

• **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Januar Bill Extension:** Policy to extend [payment deadlines for electricity](#) with a 7% discount until Feb 24.
- **Subsidized Credit for Farmers:** New 0-3% kamatne stope [loans for agricultural equipment](#) and mineral fertilizers.
- **NIS License Renewal:** Pending regulatory decision [due Feb 20](#) regarding petroleum industry operations.

• **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Ministry of Agriculture-Dairy Summit:** Press event [terminating without deal](#); ministry claims demands for import bans are impossible under current trade law.
- **New Delhi Bilateral Summit:** Press statements by Vučić and Modi [regarding bilateral trade and defense](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Vučić-Modi AI Summit:** Serbian President meets Indian PM in New Delhi [to discuss defense and AI](#); India confirms participation in Expo 2027.

- **Kosovo 18th Anniversary Protests:** Belgrade commemorates [18 years since the UDI](#); claims of desecrated graves in Skulanevo and regional military threats.
- **Agriculture Roadblocks:** Dairy farmers block Ibarska highway in [Mrčajevci and Bogatić](#) for the eighth day after failed talks.
- **NIS Petroleum Crisis:** Operational license set [to expire](#) as Croatia blocks Russian oil transit; potential sale to Hungarian MOL or Azerbaijani Adnok discussed.
- **Medveda Power Outage:** Citizens in Petrilje and surrounding villages [report 2-month electricity outages](#) with no bill reductions.
- **Geneva Peace Rounds:** Trump-pressured talks [on Ukraine](#) and Iran nuclear program continue with U.S. and regional mediators.
- **Blood Reserve Criticality:** Institute for Blood Transfusion warns [reserves are down to one day](#), particularly lacking O-type blood.
- **Fruit Price Spike:** Serbian fruit prices [rise 68%](#) due to bad harvests and Russian export blockade.
- **Champions League Football:** Galatasaray defeats Juventus [5-2 in Istanbul](#); Real Madrid and PSG secure key wins.
- **Winter Olympics Highlights:** Coverage of [Mikaela Shiffrin's lead](#) in Milan/Cortina and Lindsay Vonn's severe leg injury.
- **Bunjevac Cultural Heritage:** Anniversary of the [Bunjevac language becoming official](#) in Subotica; cultural segments on traditional art and music.

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.

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