

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

PROFESSIONAL DRIVERS RECOGNIZED AS A SPECIAL PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY TO BE EXEMPTED FROM THE SCHENGEN AREA LIMITATION OF 90 DAYS WITHIN A 180-DAY PERIOD!

Dear citizens of Serbia, dear business owners,

The protests of hauliers and drivers have entered their fifth day. The protest began following daily arrests in EU countries of both Serbian drivers and drivers from other Western Balkan countries due to exceeding the limited stay in the Schengen zone. Years of appeals to exempt professional drivers employed by companies from non-Schengen countries from the 90-day stay rule within a 180-day period did not bear fruit. Although the Schengen zone has constantly expanded, the allowed period of stay remained 90 days, practically bringing the possibility of our work and survival into question. Over the last two years, we have invested enormous efforts to professionally demonstrate the unnatural position in which our drivers and hauliers have been placed. Without success. Therefore, we decided on the hardest step for everyone: a protest by halting freight traffic at our borders. This decision was not easy. It cut off the lifeblood of this part of Europe, as well as the lifeblood of the complex European transport system. However, today, after all these years, the European Commission has clearly and unequivocally announced for the first time that professional drivers are a special category of workers requiring a stay longer than 90 days within 180 days on EU territory. It was clearly stated that the EU will work on this new visa strategy in which our drivers are recognized as a special group for whom 90 days of stay is not enough.

As we stated that the sole goal of the protest was an immediate change in the treatment of professional drivers and transport companies from our countries during transport to, from, and through Schengen countries, we believe we have achieved our goal. Furthermore, as we set the condition for ending the protest as receiving an invitation from the European Commission for a meeting to further agree on concessions treating our drivers as a special group needing more than 90 days, we believe it is a professional step on our part to end the protest and provide another chance for a professional approach to problem-solving. We believe the European Commission will understand the cessation of the protest and the reconnection of transport chains as a gesture showing that we are not terrorists, illegal workers, or illegal migrants, but professionals in our field who do not wish to leave their countries. We believe that what is written in the strategy will begin to be applied in practice even before the official acts are passed.

Because of this, but also to protect the domestic industry, we have decided to end the protest **TODAY, January 30th, at 3:00 PM**, and continue performing transport tasks. Any further extension of the disruption of freight transport chains would put our production companies and citizens in a difficult position, and we are certainly convinced that this good move by the European Commission will further provide quick legal solutions.

We hereby call upon the European Commission, Schengen member states, and European business leaders—now aware of the importance of uninterrupted transport chains—to help prevent further incomprehensible arrests and deportations of our drivers. We expect an outstretched hand from the other side and the respect deserved by the people who, during emergencies such as the pandemic, were the only ones delivering goods to everyone in Europe. Let us not wait until we lose them. Supply chains must not be interrupted again.

We owe gratitude for professional conduct to the Traffic Police Directorate, the Border Police Directorate, and the Customs Administration of the Republic of Serbia for their understanding and assistance in ensuring the protests took place without incidents. Also, we owe sincere thanks to our colleagues from the Association MDT Sistem, who supported us, as well as the Association of Drivers of Serbia, for their help in implementation and their readiness to maintain the protests until the demands were met.