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### Comment on the Eurogroup4Animals' statement on animal welfare in circuses

Dear members of the Intergroup on the welfare and conservation of animals,

as a supporting organization for animal housing and welfare in circuses we have followed your group's recent activities on this topic. In the discussion held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October the Intergroup came to the conclusion to support a ban of wild animals from circuses. Such a political agenda means limiting the freedom of profession and opposing a long European cultural tradition. Consequently this issue should be carefully considered. We strongly believe that every democratic decision-making process of a parliament should be based on an assessment of all different viewpoints. Therefore, we want to comment on the statement "Ethnological Needs and Welfare of Wild Animals in Circuses" that was presented by the Eurogroup4Animals.

We totally agree that animal welfare is of high importance. That is why we support high standards for animal housing in circuses. The Eurogroup claims that it is conventional wisdom in science that the housing conditions in circuses are against animal welfare. In fact, their statement is full of arguments that can easily be disconfirmed by scientific results:

#### 1) *Limited space availability*

Stating that circus animals spend 1-9% of the day doing training, you should also consider the time spent in the shows as additional exercise time. A lion e.g. typically spends 20 hours a day sleeping and resting (WWF animal encyclopedia 2015). More than 9% of physical activity would in this case be against the animal's natural habits. The training is keeping the animals physically and mentally active (Hediger 1955). This must be taken into account when comparing cage sizes in zoos and circuses.

The habitat size of wild animals strongly depends on the fulfillment of basic needs (e.g. food supply). Zoo biology states that an artificial habitat can be smaller than the one in nature, as long as the animal's needs are fulfilled (Althaus 1995).

## 2) *Maternal separation*

It is not true that animals are hand-reared in circuses in order to tame them. Hand-rearing is applied when the mother abandons the offspring. In this case every other option would be against animal protection laws, as it would mean willingly letting the animal die. Maternal abandonment and therefore hand-rearing of animals is an issue in all captive environments like sanctuaries and zoos (Young 2006). It is not at all a specific circus issue.

On the other hand, maternal separation is not a prerequisite for training an animal. There are recent examples of wild animals growing up in the circus together with their mother and at the same time developing a social relationship to the animal trainer.

## 3) *Restricted social interactions*

Animals in a circus do not have less, but other types of social interactions. When for example young tigers and lions are brought together in a captive environment, you can observe interactions comparable to a “normal” group of a species. This is a sign of flexibility of the animal’s social needs. Researchers found that “many species can be housed in a greater diversity of social groups than observed in the wild” (Price, Stoinski 2007). Therefore, providing the animal with an appropriate social environment does not necessarily mean copying the situation from nature. Studying the interaction between an animal and its trainer in a circus, there is no doubt that social interactions are possible even between wild animals and human beings.

## 4) *Frequent travelling*

To proof elevated stress during transport, a study of Montes et al. (2004) is quoted. In Fact, this study deals with wild badgers that are trapped in the woods to transport them for a population study. These animals are not at all tamed. Neither are they used to regular transportation. Circus animals in contrast are used to the transportation from the very beginning of their lives. Furthermore, the badgers were trapped and taken out of their usual environment, which of course causes stress. Circus animals on the other hand are transported within their environment (the transport wagon).

A scientific study that deals with the stress levels of circus lions during transportation comes to the result that there is no evidence that animal welfare is affected. The stress level measured by hormone concentrations reveals no difference to lions living in nature (Birmelin et al. 2013)

## 5) *Training and performance*

The statement claims that “training procedures that include physical punishment will be stressful for and impose fear on the animals undergoing them”. This is true and this is why we are strongly against those training methods, exactly as all good animal trainers are. Nowadays it is widely accepted that only positive reinforcement and a deep social relationship between the animal and the trainer are an appropriate basis for animal training. Training of animals is in agreement with their welfare, as long as it is based on natural behaviors (Zeeb 2005).

During a study started by the British Universities Federation for Animal Welfare circus animals were observed for 3000 hours in total. No signs of prolonged or acute stress were observed and in the training there was no evidence of cruelty (Kiley-Worthington 1990).

By giving all these comments and arguments, we do not claim that every single kind of animal keeping in a circus is good and should be supported. We state that animal welfare is possible in a circus environment, when modern standards are applied. These standards are defined and accepted in many European countries. Countries with circus animal bans are a small minority in Europe and we strongly believe that bans are the wrong way. Animal welfare cannot be enhanced by a policy that takes animals out of their social environments and bans animal trainers from their profession.

Constantly adapting animal housing conditions to scientific knowledge about the animals' needs is a much better way. In Germany this approach was followed when the guidelines "Leitlinien für die Haltung, Ausbildung und Nutzung von Tieren in Zirkusbetrieben oder ähnlichen Einrichtungen" were developed. Such kinds of self-given rules could be a model for regulations also in other European countries.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Burow

Aktionsbündnis „Tiere gehören zum Circus“

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In collaboration with:

- Dirk Candidus
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**Further information:**

[www.tiere-gehoeren-zum-circus.de](http://www.tiere-gehoeren-zum-circus.de)

[www.facebook.com/AktionsbuendnisCircustiere](https://www.facebook.com/AktionsbuendnisCircustiere)

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