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Italian Circus Traverses Russia With Exotic Animal Performers, Igniting Animal Rights Concerns

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Circo Darix Togni

One of the oldest and largest Italian circuses has arrived in Russia's northernmost city of Pevek after an epic cross-country trek — but their tour has raised concerns among Russians over the ethics of using wild animals as performers.

The Togni circus, which includes human and animal performers, had come all the way from Kazan in the republic of Tatarstan, traversing a 16,000-kilometer route, The Siberian Times news website reported. To reach Russia's northernmost city the Italian troupe spent 10 months on the road, performing in cities including Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk and Vladivostok along the way.

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Публикация от Circo Darix Togni (@circo_darix_togni) 25 Янв 2019 в 12:55 PST

Despite social media posts depicting beautiful trained animals, residents of Yakutsk in eastern Siberia were not so happy about the circus's performance there. In July, Yakutsk residents shared videos showing elephants being taken for walks through the city, sparking a petition to ban animal circuses which was signed by almost 100,000 people.

"The circus is always cruel beyond limits and circuses with animals should be banned," The Siberian Times quoted Irina Novozhilova from the VITA animal rights protection organization as saying. "There is a quota for anesthesia for animals. If something [bad] happens, it won't

be enough for even a single elephant."

Sergei Bondarchuk, the show's host, said the animals are healthy and feeling well. The circus transports its elephants, tigers, horses and other animals in ventilated trucks, he said. The caravan makes stops every three hours to feed the animals and clean their enclosures.

"The animals love the circus very much, they get bored without work," he said. "Our animals will live and die with us, they won't survive in the wild."

The State Duma in 2018 adopted a law on responsible animal handling that prohibits petting zoos and keeping wild animals in apartments but does not ban the use of wild animals in circuses.

It is illegal to show trained wild animals in circuses in Italy and in many other European countries.

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