



European Showmen's Union  
Europäische Schausteller-Union  
Union Foraine Européenne

Established in 1954 · President Albert Ritter  
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# ESU-Information

## European Showmen Union Annual Report 2023



"The wide world is our field" is the motto under which showmen and showwomen have been travelling from town to town, from village to village for generations, offering millions of people boundless fun at fairgrounds and Christmas markets. The word "borderless" can be understood quite literally here, as many fairground companies traditionally also organise fairgrounds across borders.

As colourful as the fairgrounds are all over the world, whether in Europe, America, Asia or Australia, the fairground families worldwide are united by one maxim: unity is strength!

**Below is a selection of the European Showmen's Union's main areas of work in 2023.**



The participants of the 2023 ESU Congress in Monte Carlo.

### **ESU Congress in Monte Carlo: Success through collaboration!**

After the coronavirus pandemic and the restrictions associated with the crisis, all participants at the 42nd ESU Congress were delighted to finally be able to meet with colleagues again and meet "in person". The General Assembly on 22 January marked the end of the three-day International Showmen's Meeting 2023 in Monte Carlo.

At the beginning of the plenary session, President Albert Ritter warmly welcomed the showmen and showwomen from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain, Portugal and France.

In the subsequent review of the ESU's work by President Ritter and Secretary General Steve Severeyns, the focus was on the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic for the fairground industry and fairgrounds in Europe.

According to Ritter, the pandemic has hit the European fairground industry particularly hard. However, this crisis has once again shown how important it is for showmen and showwomen to stick together across borders. "We didn't let it get us down," said Albert Ritter, "but fought together to preserve the fairgrounds and Christmas markets."

General Secretary Severeyns recalled that tens of thousands of showmen and showwomen across Europe had demonstrated during the coronavirus crisis to draw attention to the dramatic situation in the industry and make demands on politicians. He cited the demonstrations in the Netherlands (11 May 2020), Germany (2 July 2020), Belgium (31 July 2020), Switzerland (19 August 2020) and Italy (26 March 2021) as examples.

Following the presentation of the work results, DSB Managing Director Frank Hakelberg provided information on current showcase topics in Germany, which, as President Ritter

emphasised, also affect the associations and companies in neighbouring European countries. Frank Hakelberg's report focused on an overview of government coronavirus aid, the topic of "affiliated companies", the Packaging Act, the labour shortage and the effects of the energy crisis on the show business.

Promoting educational opportunities for showmen's children and young people is a central task of the European Showmen's Union. Nina Crommelin, Deputy Secretary General of the ESU and member of the board of the European Education Network ENTE, reported on the current status of European education projects for young showmen and showwomen.

Following the specialist presentations, the delegates discussed other current topics from the ESU associations. The showmen's associations Fédération des Forains de France (France), represented by Vice President Saquet Xavier, and Associação dos Profissionais Itinerantes Certificados (Portugal), represented by President Luís Paulo Fernandes, were unanimously accepted as new member associations of the ESU. President Albert Ritter warmly welcomed the new associations to the ESU.

At the invitation of the ESU Presidium, the British showmen Joannie Peaks and Bernice Wall attended the meeting in Monte Carlo and presented the "Future 4 Fairgrounds" campaign with a power point presentation.



The new ESU Executive Committee: (from left) Vice President Alex James Colquhoun, Vice President Are Arnardo, Vice President Atze Lubach-Koers, Vice President Charles Senn, President Albert Ritter, Secretary General Steve Severeyns, Deputy Secretary General Nina Crommelin.

In the Executive Committee elections, Albert Ritter was confirmed in his position as President by a large majority. He will be supported for the next term of office by the likewise re-elected Vice Presidents Atze Lubach-Koers and Charles Senn as well as the newly elected Vice Presidents Are Arnardo and Alex James Colquhoun. The ESU team is

completed by the Secretary General Steve Severeyns, who was also confirmed in office, and the re-elected Deputy Secretary General Nina Crommelin. The President of the European Showmen's Women's Union, Rosa Severeyns, was also confirmed in Monte Carlo; the new President of the European Showmen's Youth Union is Bernhard Parpalioni.



Meeting of the specialist group "Recognising fairground culture" in Luxembourg in May 2019.

Cultural recognition of fairgrounds and traditional showmanship on the right track  
Another important step has been taken towards securing the future of fairgrounds and traditional showmanship worldwide in 2023. On 31 March, the updated multinational application for recognition of the lively fairground culture and traditional showmanship as intangible cultural heritage was officially submitted to UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Over the past few years, showmen's representatives from the national ESU associations have worked with international cultural experts to prepare the application documents, which include a comprehensive justification and a video documentary financed by the ESU on the cultural and historical significance of showmanship and fairgrounds in Europe. The updated application now submitted in Paris contains further detailed positions and arguments on the cultural significance of the fairground profession, which has been cultivated by showmen and showwomen across generations in Europe for centuries. The multinational application was submitted to UNESCO on behalf of Belgium and France. The background to this is that fairground culture has already been included in the respective national registers in these countries. "This is," explained ESU Secretary General Steve Severeyns, "a prerequisite for the nomination of a cultural form, such as European fairground culture, for one of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists.

Countries in which fairground culture and showmanship are recognised nationally at a later stage can be integrated into the multinational application."

The application to recognise Europe's vibrant fairground culture will now be forwarded to the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee, which will decide whether to include it on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity following a detailed review by an advisory committee. This evaluation process will take around a year and a half, meaning that a final decision can be expected at the end of 2024.



Vice President Atze Lubach-Koers (centre) congratulates Albert Ritter on behalf of the ESU.

### **"70 ... for a beer": atmospheric birthday celebration for President Albert Ritter**

His heart beats with pride for the fairground industry and the centuries-old fairground culture in Europe - and has done so for 70 years now. On 2 July, Albert Ritter, President of the European Showmen's Union and the German Showmen's Association, celebrated his 70th birthday with his guests at the Cranger Kirmesplatz in Herne.

In perfect fairground weather, numerous colleagues from the European and German showmen's associations, politicians from the federal, state, district and local authorities, representatives of churches and associations as well as friends, companions and family members accepted the invitation to the "Zum Ritter" beer garden under the motto "70 ... for a beer". On behalf of the European Showmen's Union, Vice President Atze Lubach-Koers and Deputy Secretary General Nina Crommelin congratulated Albert Ritter on his birthday.



The participants of the ENTE Annual General Meeting in Hilden: (from left to right) Christian Gleser, Oliver Thier, Helga Sinner, Helmut Grosscurth, Marlies Stotz, Torsten Heinrich, Eva Röthig, Bärbel Fritz, Albert Ritter, Sascha Ellinghaus, Heinz Gniostko, Nina Crommelin, Bernhard van Welzenes, Annette Schwer. Not in the photo: Nora Booij, Martin Treichel, Dr Margit Ramus. Photo: ENTE

### **ESU at the annual general meeting of the ENTE education network**

Improving educational opportunities for children of professional travellers in Europe is the central task of the European Network for Traveller Education (ENTE), which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2022. The European Showmen's Union is a founding member of ENTE and has supported the association's work for many years. This year's Annual General Meeting was held in Hilden on 13 September and was attended by ESU President Albert Ritter.

At the beginning, President Bernhard van Welzenes welcomed the representatives of the ENTE member organisations ESU, Deutscher Schaustellerbund (DSB), European Circus Association (ECA), Stichting Rijdende School, Katholische Circus- und Schaustellerseelsorge, RK Parochie voor Kermis, Circus en Binnenvaart u. FORUM, Bundesverband für die Bildung der Kinder beruflich Reisender (BERiD), Circus- und Schaustellerseelsorge der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland and Institut für individuelle Förderung und Schulmanagement warmly welcome you to the school for circus children. Nora Booij from the Stichting Rijdende School and education expert Martin Treichel joined the meeting via video.

One of the main topics of the meeting was the discussion and consultation on recognising fairground and circus culture as intangible cultural assets. ESU President Albert Ritter, ECA Managing Director Helmut Grosscurth and historian and showwoman Dr Margit Ramus provided information on the current status. On 31 March 2023, the ESU officially

submitted the updated multinational application for recognition of living fairground culture and traditional showmanship as intangible cultural heritage to UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Also in March 2023, the "circus as an independent form of performing art" was included in the German "Nationwide Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage".

ENTE has been an official member of the European lobby organisation for children and young people Eurochild since May 2023. The work of the network, which was founded in 2004, is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The vision is a society in which children can grow up happy, healthy and self-confident by having their rights respected and realised. To this end, Eurochild brings together various organisations, stakeholders and umbrella associations at European level to exchange information and coordinate their work. Eurochild regularly submits recommendations to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. Eurochild also organises campaigns, discussion forums, conferences, seminars and publications. The network comprises over 200 members in 41 countries.

The European Showmen's Union had supported ENTE's application to join Eurochild. At the annual meeting in Hilden, President Bernhard van Welzenes once again thanked the ESU for its successful commitment. The participants then discussed ENTE's future tasks and objectives within the Eurochild network.

Another topic of the meeting was the preparations for ENTE's participation in the international education conference as part of the Circus Festival 2024 in Budapest from 10 to 15 January 2024.



Pure fairground fun!

### **Seasonal balance 2023: Clear signal for the future of fairgrounds**

Following the successful restart of fairgrounds in Europe in 2022, a positive trend was also evident in the second year after the end of the coronavirus crisis: "People want

"fairgrounds!" declared President Albert Ritter at the end of the 2023 season. Since the coronavirus pandemic subsided, there has been a "veritable renaissance", which has given the fairground companies hope. Although the lack of staff and high energy costs - to name just two current examples - continue to pose major problems for fairground companies in Europe, Albert Ritter said that the "fairground visitors voting with their feet" was a clear signal for the future of fairgrounds and the fairground industry.

General Secretary Steve Severeyns was also confident in his assessment of the season's results. Although the weather did not play along as well as last year with a few rainy weeks and hot days, "we can still speak of a good season", said Steve Severeyns. "People," he explained, "have found their way to the fairground again and they want to party! This trend is also confirmed by the feedback from the national ESU associations; even if, as I said, the weather didn't play along. Of course, the overall development also makes us happy, as it shows that the fairground as a cultural asset still has a future and can hold its own despite the great competition in the leisure sector. Despite some prophecies of doom from politicians during the coronavirus pandemic, when the future of fairgrounds as open-air public events was called into question, we can now say that there is a future for fairgrounds! There is a future for the next generation of fairground organisers! And the ESU and its national showmen's associations will continue to campaign for acceptable framework conditions for the benefit of European showmen's businesses. That makes us feel positive and gives us the strength and courage to keep fighting."

## **ESU-Information**

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