**Award Ceremony of the European Entente Florale 2016 in Brno**

Friday 23rd of September 2016.

Speech by Mr. Dirk Vandromme, President of the A.E.F.P.

**United in the spirit of Entente Florale Europe**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Mister Vladimír Dolejský, Deputy Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic ,

Dear Mister Petr Vokral, Mayor of Brno,

Dear deputies and delegates of towns and villages of all participating countries all over Europe,

Distinguished guests and friends of Entente Florale Europe,

**Welcome all**

On behalf of the organisation A.E.F.P., the *Association Européenne pour le Fleurissement et le Paysage*, I would like to bid you all a warm welcome to the 2016 Award Ceremony of Entente Florale Europe, here in the wonderful, green city of Brno, whose infrastructure, both historical and contemporary, we will be able to enjoy in the next days. We are privileged witnesses of the fine achievements in terms of green planning and environmental awareness here in our host city, Brno.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the city council of Brno and to the organising committee of the Award Ceremony. Special thanks go to the association of Entente Florale of the Czech Republic and to ms Simona Valentova for the practical support.

We are grateful for your kind hospitality and pleased with the excellent organisation. I am sure, the Award Ceremony will be a delightful and happy event.

**Everyone is a winner**

First of all, I would like to congratulate all participants in this European competition. Your presence here tonight and the fact that your community was able to take part in Entente Florale Europe proves your city or municipality belongs to the European cream of the crop in green planning and environmental awareness. Perhaps a number of participants will be somewhat disappointed by the results that will be announced shortly by the president of our international jury.

However, I believe that the great honour of having being nominated by your home country to participate in one of the largest and most prestigious European competitions for towns and villages, makes every one of you a winner tonight.

What matters most, ladies and gentlemen, is the team spirit that was gradually built up in every participating city and municipality during the preparations over the last months. This team spirit resulted in a very tight cooperation between various city departments and organisations. This allowed all persons involved to surpass themselves and to cross boundaries that were once thought uncrossable.

The effects of this pleasant experience can still be felt today in this very room. Your teamwork has lead to amazing achievements, that were independently judged by our international jury.

**More than 40 years of competition**

The European Entente Florale competition was first held in 1975 and has been an annual event ever since.

In more than 40 years, the competition itself has grown into an important tool to put focus on green urban elements. Over all these years the competition has changed from a flower contest into a modern and general audit for European towns and villages focused on green spaces in urban areas and environmental issues.

At present, there are nine European member states involved in the competition of Entente Florale Europe. More than 700 towns and villages have taken part in the competition since 1975. These participants were all judged by a competent group of international experts.

All these participants are now united by Entente Florale Europe.

The mission of our European competition is to provide a basis for nature, public parks and gardens in towns and villages, with the objective of improving the local quality of life.

The main assessment criteria of the competition are: vegetation and landscape, the environment and tourism. The daily involvement of citizens is also a very important factor.

**Ambition, vision and management**

Ladies and gentlemen, climate change simply cannot be ignored. Today, climate change is a fact! The participation of your city or town in the competition of Entente Florale Europe demonstrates your concern and active commitment to improve the quality of life in your community.

More and more people live in urban areas. The city, as an urban complex, was rediscovered, so they say. Therefore, the presence of green spaces, large parks and natural elements is of great interest to the modern townplanning. Our cities need green infrastructure. Furthermore, the relationship between city and countryside is growing ever more important.

Today and in the future, our cities need plenty of space for green elements. Not only for our personal health. Green cities are not only beautiful and colorful but also create opportunities for recreation and tourism, and provide space for social contacts, integration of nature and biodiversity in our living areas. Green cities improve the quality of our environment. Green and open spaces also create opportunities for urban agriculture and promote economic activity.

At present, there are quite a few straightforward possibilities at hand to make our cities more liveable by implementing green and natural elements. Just think of sports parks, industrial estates, green parkings and cemeteries, urban and regional parks. With some creativity, we can offer our population surprising projects. I think of reconverting abandoned industrial areas, military bases and railway yards, the construction of roof gardens or green facades. Upgrading and using water elements in a multifunctional way in our residential areas is also an opportunity to add green to the city.

This year, the jury has witnessed a lot of beautiful, contemporary realisations.

To achieve all this, there is a need for ambition, with a clear vision for the future but also with strong management. Your participation in Entente Florale Europe is proof of the ambition of your city or village. Congratulations! You were willing to share your projects and plans with the jury of our international organisation. Our jury members found that all participants have actively searched for high quality green solutions. The competition has shown that a partnership between citizens, business enterprises and various local organisations is usually a good basis for success.

**Thanks to everyone**

As the President of the A.E.F.P., I would like to thank the panel of judges for their great efforts. I would especially like to thank the chairman of the jury, Mr. Rudi Geerardyn from Belgium and the Vice-Chairmen of the jury, Mr. Martin Wagner from Austria and Ms. Inka Truxova from the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to all board members of A.E.F.P.

In addition, I would like to express my thanks to the Vice Presidents of A.E.F.P., namely Mr. Herbert Titz from Austria and Ms. Inka Truxova from the Czech Republic.

And last but not least, special mention goes to our Secretary General, Mr. János Prutkay from Hungary, who has worked tirelessly for our international association.

Ladies and gentlemen, congratulations and thanks for your participation, conviction and commitment to realize more and better green and nature in our European towns and cities.

I wish you all success in future!!!

Let us remain united in the spirit of Entente Florale Europe!

I thank you all for your attention.

Vandromme Dirk,

President of AEFP | Entente Florale Europe