

# THE INVESTIGATOR



A FILM BY

VIKTOR PORTEL

73 mins / 2022 / Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, English, Czech, English Subtitles / Czech Republic, Croatia



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## FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival, Czech Republic

International Documentary Festival FIPADOC, France

Official Selection CineCulture Fresno State College, US



## SYNOPSIS

More than 25 years have passed since the war crimes that occurred in former Yugoslavia, yet the impact of this tragic history still lingers. It continues to affect the victims' families, conflicting nations and the investigator who returns to the region to resume his work after many years. Vladimír Dzuro is the first Czech investigator to have worked for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. During his tenure, he collected evidence against war criminals and perpetrators of ethnic cleansing. "The Investigator" highlights the dual nature of the International Criminal Court's ethical mission: independently investigating war crimes while striving for reconciliation in cases of ethnic, national, and other conflicts. The documentary is inspired by Vladimir Dzuro's bestselling book, "The Investigator – Demons of the Balkan War."

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia only sentenced a fragment of the perpetrators – a hundred key actors of the conflict who bore military or political responsibility. However, it naturally also had an indisputable symbolical dimension. With the benefit of hindsight, it is legitimate to ask what this huge international intervention brought us. I am far from challenging the meaningfulness of establishing the Tribunal as such; however, since it was said many times that its goal was to investigate the particular crimes to bring the reconciliation of the individual nations, we need to ask what consequences this gigantic international intervention had and how it recreated the landscape of the multiethnic and multinational conflict. What it improved, what it prevented; and, on the contrary, what it irreversibly damaged. What remained in the minds of the people. VLADIMIR DZURO along with all the protagonists of our film, definitely did not break out of the past.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR VIKTOR PORTEL

### **1) What drew you to this topic?**

The main reason why I became interested in the story of Vladimír Dzuro was that so far there is very little reflection on how the Hague Tribunal, the largest international mechanism in history, worked, and how it is perceived in the countries where it operated.

### **2) It's been 25 years since the conflict in former Yugoslavia, why is it important to remember what happened there and to revisit these sites in the film?**

The reason is simple: the past is still extremely alive in the countries of former Yugoslavia. Many Serbs, Croats and Bosnians really believe that the international justice system was unfair to them, insufficient, and that the giant colossus of the Tribunal was above all tiring. They cannot be entirely blamed for this disillusionment; the reality is that only a tiny fraction of the perpetrators who directly participated in war crimes were convicted. One of the most interesting moments while working on this film was searching for a way to critically approach international justice while at the same time defending it.

**3) At one point in the film, Vladimír Dzuro says that it would be best if the national courts of the countries in question sentenced their criminals.**

This is very interesting; the whole mechanism of the Hague Tribunal was designed to convict the key and politically responsible perpetrators of genocide. It was supposed to function as a certain institutional boost for courts in individual countries, which were then supposed to place on trial the lowerlevel perpetrators of war crimes. This was partly successful, but in all countries a stumbling block occurred when they began to try war criminals of their own ethnicity, that was much more problematic.

**4) How did you find your interviewees?**

We selected people whose stories did not end in the nineties but were continuing to develop. I did not want to be just another filmmaker who came to ask what horrors had happened in the nineties. I wanted to go the extra mile and focus on what it looks like for them to deal with the trauma of war and what role international justice played in that.

**5) What is the importance of the international justice system in today's context?**

In my opinion, this is one of the most important topics of our time. The ongoing war in Ukraine is, of course, very different from the confusing conflict in the former Yugoslavia. But the main point remains the same: to show perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity that international justice exists, and that they will never be able to sleep peacefully again. I think it's great that the international community is acting quickly in this regard, because the key now is to gather evidence of the crimes that are being committed. The process of presenting evidence and sentencing is of course much more complicated. But even so, the pressure that international justice exerts fills me with hope.

**6) The film is mainly comprised of people's memories and oral history, yet the film is very cinematic. How did you achieve this?**

My main goal was to not only focus on individual testimonies and the story of Vladimír Dzuro's investigation, but also to create a space for reflection in the film. That's why we chose a method of reconstructing events; we returned with the interviewees to the places which they mention in their narratives. I wanted to be able to work with the audio statements of the interviewees with as much freedom as possible and not overwhelm the viewer with the sight of talking heads. The key to the overall look of the film was the collaboration with cameraman Šimon Dvořáček



## **DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY**

Viktor Portel is a director and head of film production at the non-profit organization Post Bellum. The Investigator is his feature debut. He participated as a creator and story editor in the exhibition Memory of the Nation in the underground of the former Stalin monument in Prague (2018) and the projection Memory of the Nation entitled "1989" for the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. He is also a curator of interactive exhibitions at the Memory of Nations Institute. As a trainer, he helps to develop documentation projects in places where remembering is not as easy as it is in Czech Republic (Burma, Cuba, Ukraine). He is the author and director of many episodes of the Czech TV series Stories of the 20th Century. His film Havel Heart (2013) won the first prize of the Czech Press Photo in the Online news and reportage category. Viktor graduated from the Department of Documentary Production at FAMU.

## **VLADIMÍR DZURO BIOGRAPHY**

Vladimir Dzuro, Police Commissioner ret. used to work (between 1983 and 1995), as a criminal investigator for the Police of the Czech Republic. Initially he worked at the Homicide Squad in Prague and later at the Interpol (National Central Bureau) in Prague. In 1994, Vladimir actively participated in the work of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR). Since April 1995 (for almost 10 years), Vladimir held the position of an investigator at the Office of the Prosecutor in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, Holland. Vladimir, until March 2023, worked as the Chief of the Headquarters Investigation Unit at the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services in New York. Currently, Vladimir lectures NATO Military Police investigators on various aspects of war crime investigations.

Vladimir has received:

- Long Service Award from the United Nations Secretary-General.
- Medal for Service to International Justice from the ICTY Registrar
- Golden Linden Medal (highest departmental award) from the Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic
- Medal of Honor for permanent contribution to building and promoting the good name of the Police of the Czech Republic and Medal for long-term and extraordinary contribution to building safety and peace from the Czech Police President
- International Award from the Italian Diplomatic Academy in recognition of his contribution to the improvement of procedures in the application of justice and legality in the world.

Vladimir's unique personal testimony is provided in his bestselling book The Investigator – Demons of the Balkan War published in the Czech Republic by Grada Publishing 2017:

- <https://www.grada.cz/vysetrovatel-9688/>.
- Its English version was published in the United States by Potomac Books (University of Nebraska Press) in 2019:  
<https://a.co/d/azBX88D>
- Vladimir Dzuro is also a co-author of the graphic novel based on real events Demons of the Balkan War (Grada Publishing 2022):  
<https://www.grada.cz/demoni-balkanske-valky-12385/>

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Director and screenwriter: Viktor Portel

Idea: Martina Šantavá

Director Of Photograph: Šimon Dvořáček

Editor: Vladimír Gojun

Sound Designer: Dominik Dolejší

Music Composers: Dominik Dolejší, Adam Levý

Sound recordists: Filip Ledinšćak, Niko Gulam

Executive producer: Roman Blaas

Production managers: Karolína Fránková, Suzana Erbežnik

Associate producer: Vanja Jambrović

Creative producers (Czech TV): Martina Šantavá, Rebeka Bartůňková

Producer: Hana Blaha Šilarová

Co-producer: Oliver Sertić

Production: Frame Films (CZ)

Co-production: Restart (HR), Czech TV (CZ), Croatian Radiotelevision (HR), Al

Jazeera Balkans

In association with: Post Bellum (CZ)