

Frame Films
In co-production with Restart and Czech Television,
Croatian Radiotelevision, Al Jazeera Balkans
In association with Post Bellum

And with the financial support of the Czech Film Fund, Croatian
Audiovisual Centre, City of Zagreb and Vukovar Srijem County

Present

THE INVESTIGATOR

A documentary film by Viktor Portel



PRESS KIT



Category: European Stories

Year: 2022

Country: Czech Republic, Croatia

Running time: 73 min

Format: DCP, MP4

Festivals: Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival 2022 (World Premiere), FIPADOC 2023 (International Premiere)

Logline

A former investigator of The Hague Tribunal returns to the Balkans, to places where war crimes were committed nearly 30 years ago. Can justice be brought from the outside?

Synopsis

Vladimír Dzuro is the first Czech criminal investigator to have worked for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. In the 1990's he collected evidence against war criminals and hunted perpetrators of ethnic cleansing. We join Vladimír Dzuro on his metaphorical and physical journey across the former Yugoslavia to the places where his investigations took place. He recalls his two biggest cases- the Ovčara massacre related to Vukovar's mayor Slavko Dokmanović in Croatia, and the ethnic cleansing committed by the warlord Zeljko Ražnatović Arkan in Sanski Most, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Survivors of these cases give testimony and bring the often-painful past into the present moment.

What is the landscape of the Balkans, which saw a fratricidal conflict twenty-five years ago, like today? What happened to the people who still live there and to their memories? What is the significance and meaning of justice that is brought from the outside? And can justice be attained?

The film is inspired by Vladimir Dzuro's bestselling book *The Investigator – Demons of the Balkan War* (Grada, 2017, and Potomac Books, 2019).

[Link to trailer](#)

About

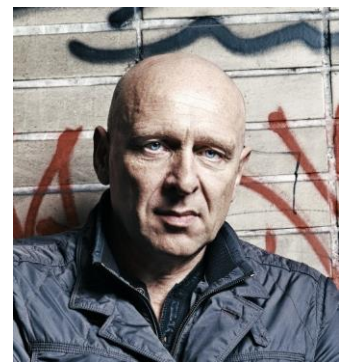
Viktor Portel, the director



Viktor Portel is a director and head of film production at the non-profit organization Post Bellum. The film *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, main protagonist, the investigator

Vladimír Dzuro, a retired police commissioner, used to work as a criminal investigator at the Criminal Investigative Division in Prague and subsequently as a Senior Special Agent at the Czech National Central Bureau of Interpol. In 1994, Vladimír actively participated in the work of the UN peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) and in April 1995, he began a ten-year stint as an investigator for the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Vladimír currently heads the headquarters section of the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services in New York. For his many years of successful work for the International Tribunal, he received the International Justice Medal.



Interview with Viktor Portel

1) What drew you to this topic?

The main reason why I became interested in the story of Vladimír Džuro 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 Džuro 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 lower-level 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.



About Frame Films

Frame Films production company focuses on creative audiovisual projects with artistic elements. Producers Jitka Kotrlová, Zuzana Kučerová and Hana Blaha Šilarová have teamed up to work on the projects together and they work as a collective. The producers often work with the same authors on multiple projects. The company has produced a VR film *Darkening* (premiered at Venice IFF), documentaries *The Investigator* (premiered at Ji.hlava IDFF), *The Killing of a Journalist* (premiered at Hot Docs), *Wolves at the Borders* (premiered at Visions du Réel), *Central Bus Station* (premiered at Sheffield Doc/Fest), *Vote for Kibera* (premiered at Ji.hlava IDFF and FIPADOC), *Empire Builders* (premiered at One World IHRDFF and Festival dei Popoli), *Never Happened* (SK/CZ co-production premiered at Warsaw IFF), a feature fiction *Snowing!* (Premiered at Days of European Film and Neisse FF) and a short animated film *Ant Hill* (premiered at Animafest Zagreb). Three of the company's films were co-funded by successful crowdfunding campaigns.

The company has various projects in development and production (*Human Beeing*, funded by Creative Europe – MEDIA), including TV series (*Darkness, Three Against the Gestapo*).

Credits

Director and screenwriter: Viktor Portel
Idea: Martina Šantavá
DOP: Šimon Dvořáček
Editor: Vladimír Gojun
Sound Designer: Dominik Dolejší
Music Composers: Dominik Dolejší, Adam Levý
Sound recordists: Filip Ledinščák, 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)
World Sales: Filmdelights

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The film *The Investigator* was produced in co-production with Restart, Czech Television, Croatian Radiotelevision, Al Jazeera Balkan and in association with Post Bellum. The film has financial support from the Czech Film Fund, Croatian Audiovisual Centre, City of Zagreb and Vukovar Srijem County



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The Investigator was presented at Docu Talents from the East @Sarajevo FF organized by Ji.hlava IDFF. This film was supported by the East Doc Platform 2022 organized by the Institute of Documentary Film, Czech Republic.



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