

**Ordinary People****A day plunged in darkness**

A masterful and merciless debut feature on the trivialization of murder in times of war. A film unveiled at Cannes and selected at around 15 international festivals

by Fabien Lemercier

"We're going to deal with the enemy": with these words, the leader of a small military contingent in the Balkans, which could be any army in any country at war, sends his ten or so soldiers on a terrible day-long mission, described masterfully and brutally by Serbian director **Vladimir Perisic's** debut feature: *Ordinary People*.

Co-produced by France, Serbia and Switzerland, this terse work with minimalist dialogues and a bucolic atmosphere plunged *Critics' Week* viewers into the heart of a harrowing process of desensitisation to unjustified murder.

(The article continues below - Commercial information)



Day breaks, some soldiers are woken in an army camp and set off by bus to an unknown destination. The radio pours out forceful anti-terrorist propaganda (without failing to point out that "those who commit war crimes will be severely punished"), while the green country landscape passes by.

It's summer and the men arrive at a large, deserted farm made up of little buildings. Thus begins a long wait in the shade of the trees for Dzoni (**Relja Popovic**), a young man of around 20, who is a recent arrival in the contingent, after joining the army for want of anything better to do. Then some prisoners are transported in a lorry and the order is given to execute them.

This situation is repeated several times throughout a long day in which Dzoni, whose conscience rebels at the start ("Don't ask too many questions! Relax, it'll be alright") gradually becomes a killer like the rest, an ordinary man in this sun-filled darkness.

Filming almost entirely in long, static shots that study the silent faces, with the inclusion of a few, very beautiful travelling shots, Perisic (who also wrote the script) places the slow passage of time at the heart of his film. This creates a compelling atmosphere in which the natural beauty seems tainted by the harshness of the executions and the sound of explosions.

The moral burden weighing down on the soldiers is eased by alcohol and a few unreal attempts to return to normality ("It's perfect weather for going fishing") or humanity (a shared cigarette). But nobody escapes the duty of delivering death and each has to live alone with this secret ("Don't say a word about today!"). This clinical description of a terrifying reality is explored in a realist style and looks at the symbolic initiation to evil, giving *Ordinary People* a universal and philosophical resonance.

Produced by French company **TS Productions** in co-production with **Arte France Cinéma**,

Serbia's Trilema and Switzerland's *Prince Film* and TSE, *Ordinary People* received backing from *Eurimages*, Centre Images, the Hubert Bals Fund and the Federal Office for Culture (OFC).