

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Cosma Ioana, PhD

## **POLICE, ADJECTIVE / POLIȚIST, ADJECTIV (2009)**

Corneliu Porumboiu

### **Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)**

#### OVERVIEW

**AUTEUR** Corneliu Porumboiu is one of the Romanian New Wave film directors. He was born in Vaslui, Romania, in 1975 and first studied management at the National Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest between 1994 and 1998. After this, he enrolled in the Theatre and Film Academy (UNATC) Bucharest and graduated in 2003. He has won several awards, the most important of which are *Un certain regard* at the Cannes Film festival for both this film *Police, Adjective* (2009) and *The Treasure* (2015).

**FILM** *Police, Adjective* was filmed in Vaslui, Romania, the director's hometown. The movie received the Jury Award and the Firepisci Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009, in the *Un certain regard* section. It also received the Best Movie Award at the TIFF International Film Festival in Cluj-Napoca, Romania (2009), Special Mention at the Ljubljana Film Festival (2009), Best Feature at the L'Alternativa Barcelona Film Festival and the GOPO award (Romania) for Best Feature (2010).

**BACKGROUND** The film casts Dragoș Bucur as Cristi, Vald Ivanov as Anghelache and Irina Săulescu as Anca. It is 115 minutes long and was produced by Dan Burlac. The movie focuses on the drug problems that Romania was facing at the time, alongside the problems in the education and justice systems. Through its characters, the movie covers all these issues. The most visible problem is the consumption of drugs by teenagers, which was beginning to explode at the time and has now become a major issue in contemporary Romania. There were many deaths by teenagers because of the drug consumption and drug trafficking was found even among school teachers. Porumboiu tried to give a wakeup call to a problem that was to become irrepressible in Romanian society.

#### SYNOPSIS

*Police, Adjective* is a drama about a young police officer's dilemma over arresting or not arresting a drug-addicted teenager. Cristi, the police officer, starts his investigation by following Victor, the teenager. But his pursuit leaves him with inconclusive evidence. Victor and a friend of his, Dana, have been turned in to the police for their consumption of drugs by their best friend, Alex. Cristi begins to suspect that Alex has ulterior motives and begins to pursue him. In the meantime, Cristi is told by one of his superiors to stop the investigation and arrest Victor, but Cristi does not heed this command. He learns that Alex's parents are rich and that his brother was involved in a car accident a few years before. Cristi's boss, however, summons Cristi to his office. Cristi, however, does not want to end the investigation and tries to find as much as he can so that he can help Victor. However, he has too little time and he has found too little by the time he has to go to his boss' office. There, the boss tries to teach him a lesson and show him he does not even know why he wants to continue the investigation. However, Cristi does not give in until the moment his boss threatens to fire him should he refuse to arrest Victor. The boss gives Cristi until the next day to decide. The next day, he is in his boss' office, organizing Victor's arrest.

#### CHARACTERS

Cristi – a police officer

Anghelache – Cristi's boss

Anca – Cristi's wife

Dana – a teenager

Alex – a teenager

Victor – a teenager

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **Cristi**

Cristi is the main character of the movie. He is a young police officer who hopes to be able to bring true justice to a flawed legal system. He is adventurous and also tolerant towards the case he is dealing with. He becomes suspicious of the evidence offered him and he digs deeper. He remains dissatisfied with the way things work.

*Adventurous* Cristi is an adventurous police officer. He works with organized crime and investigates a drug dealing case. He pursues this investigation and looks for all possible causes of the crime. When he is prevented from going further by his superiors, he continues his search, on his own time.

*Tolerant* Cristi is tolerant towards Victor, the prime suspect in his case. He tries to understand Victor's choice of taking drugs in the larger context of contemporary times when young people from Western Europe are free to take drugs. He believes that Victor should get a more lenient treatment because the laws will be changed in Romania concerning drug taking, and Victor will have been convicted for nothing.

*Aware* Cristi is however suspicious of Victor's best friend, Alex. Alex has turned his friend into the police, and Cristi suspects that Alex's motives are not good. He decides to follow Alex and maybe find something, but there is little time and he is unable to find anything.

*Dissatisfied* At the end of the movie, Cristi remains dissatisfied with the justice and police systems in general and with his own decision. He has tried really hard to prove Victor's innocence and he must be frustrated for being prevented from doing so.

### **Anghelache**

Anghelache is Cristi's boss at work. He is a man who knows the laws well and is aware of Cristi's crisis. He does not disparage Cristi but engages in proving him wrong. He is determined to make Cristi follow his orders, no matter what.

*Aware* Anghelache is a man who is aware of Cristi's crisis. He tries to bring Cristi to his senses by reminding him of the law and of the meaning of the word 'conscience' but is unsuccessful because the dictionary does not give sufficient or relevant information.

*Engaged* Anghelache is engaged in his quest of rescuing Cristi from the crisis he is going through. Very patiently, he asks Cristi to read the definitions of several words from the Romanian Explicative Dictionary, so as to prove Cristi wrong and to show him he does not even know what 'conscience' means.

### **Anca**

Anca is Cristi's wife. She is the type of wife endowed with an imagination, like that of Madame Bovary, because she is dissatisfied with her own marriage. She is a teacher of Romanian.

*Disloyal* Anca is disloyal as we can infer from the episode when she listens for hours on end to the same loud love song. She is probably imagining being with the man she is in love with, who is very likely someone other than Cristi since he is in the other room and she could simply spend the evening with him.

*Dissatisfied* Anca is dissatisfied with her loveless marriage. We can see this from the apathetic way she talks to Cristi, which is quite dissimilar to the exalted mood she was in when listening to music. Probably, they have both come to this dissatisfaction because of overwork.

### **Alex**

Alex is Victor's friend. He has turned Victor in for drug consumption and trafficking. He is uncooperative and disloyal.

*Uncooperative* When Cristi asks Alex to meet him in a bar, Alex agrees but cooperates very little. He says the same things he has already reported to the police, and when Cristi asks him why he and Victor are no longer such good friends, he says he would like to leave.

*Disloyal* Alex is disloyal because he has betrayed Victor and Dana, his best friends. He has turned Victor into the police and accused him of drug trafficking. Because of him, Victor risks going to jail in his teenager years.

## THEMES

**Work** Work is an essential theme in the movie. *Police, Adjective* explores the work of police officers, through the character of Cristi and some of his colleagues. We learn that police officers do not have the best working conditions; they work in cramped offices and have to deal with a lot of unnecessary bureaucracy. Cristi is a dedicated police officer, yet he is hampered in his investigation by a system that works improperly. When he asks for several files of people on his case, he obtains them too late. Moreover, he is even told off for asking for them on such short notice. His colleague from the office is disenchanted by his work because he has too much paperwork and cannot actually work on a case. Both Cristi and his colleague depend on higher-rank officers who also impede the progress of their investigations. Cristi is clearly told to close the case by arresting Victor both by a higher-rank officer and by his boss. They do not care for Cristi's opinion that more investigation should be carried out. Nobody seems interested in spending much time on the case, so they force Cristi to act against his conscience.

**Education** The education system is criticized indirectly in the movie. The three kids who are under investigation all go to school. They are high school students and they smoke their hashish cigarettes in the vicinity of the school. The film director criticizes the entry of drugs inside schools in Romania in recent years. When the movie appeared, in 2009, people were not very aware of this problem in the country. But years later, we have become acutely aware that drugs are making thousands of victims among school children. The movie could be thus interpreted as wake-up call to a problem that has come to plague Romania and its teenagers. The three kids met at school and the one providing drugs for them could be an outsider or someone from the school. Nowadays, even teachers were reported to have acted as drug dealers in schools. This is a systemic problem that Porumboiu managed to demonstrate in a relevant and poignant way. The school system is also indirectly criticized through the character of Anca, a teacher of Romanian. She is keen on observing the grammar rules and she points to Cristi when he makes mistakes. This is a case of the Romanian chronic attention to form rather than content.

**Language** This issue of form over content appears from the start, through the ironic title *Police, Adjective*. The title alludes to one of the discussions between Cristi and Anca, when Anca tells Cristi that he has made a grammatical mistake in his report. He has written 'nici o' instead of 'nicio' ('no one' instead of 'none'), which, according to the new rules of Romanian is to be written as one word (the negative pronominal adjective, not pronoun). Thus, we could interpret the title to mean 'no policeman' but with the ironic touch that this is an arbitrary rule.

The title could also refer to Cristi's jeopardized position when he decides not to heed the advice of his superiors. Porumboiu clearly makes a case here, too, of form over content, namely that the idea of a situation is not as important as its form. This goes hand in hand with the emphasis on paperwork as opposed to real detective work. So also with language, where teachers are more preoccupied to teach students these arbitrary and, at times, senseless rules, than to teach them the significance and sense of language and life. In the context of the movie, we could say that this inclination towards form over content is one of the reasons for the students' becoming alienated from schools and beginning to take drugs.

**Crime** Drug taking and drug dealing are still serious crimes in Romania. As stated before, they have become one of the plagues of contemporary Romanian society. In the movie, the idea of drug taking as a crime is questioned by Cristi. He wonders if it is fair to convict school children/teenagers for drug consumption while in Western Europe young people take drugs in the streets. Moreover, he believes that in Romania laws will be changed in the coming years so that smoking certain drugs would become legal. This opens a big debate between him and his boss. While Cristi represents the open, liberal way of seeing matters, his boss represents the conservative, by-the-book way of looking at things. Cristi does not want to disrespect the law, but he truly believes that it will be changed in a few years because of the situation in Europe. His boss is a law-abiding man, who explains to Cristi that they are not law-makers, but rather law-enforcers and that it is not up to them to pass laws. Cristi's dilemma makes way for a philosophical debate on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of drug-taking.

**Justice** Is justice still possible when the matter of drug taking cannot be easily pinned down? Porumboiu seems to say yes, as long as you keep your conscience clear no matter what. When Cristi goes to see his boss, the latter asks him why he can't close the case. Cristi responds that it would be a burden on his conscience because it would mean destroying the life of a possibly innocent teenager. At which point, the boss opens the big Romanian dictionary and asks Cristi to look up the term 'conscience'. The dictionary does not give the best definition or the one that the boss expects in order to 'close his case' so the boss takes the matter into his own hands and gives an ultimatum to Cristi to either arrest Victor and keep his job or not arrest Victor and lose his job. Eventually, Cristi gives in and goes back to close the case. However, Porumboiu has made his point that justice in this movie is blind because it does not take into account the larger picture and de-contextualizes the facts. Justice is impossible not because there is no will to do achieve it but because we live in a system which makes it impossible to choose correctly between right and wrong.

**Investigation** The whole movie is an investigation of a crime reported by a teenager. Alex has reported that he and his friends Dana and Victor take drugs. Moreover, he has ratted on his friend, Victor, saying that Victor is also a drug dealer. Cristi starts the investigation by following Victor, but he is unable to find anything to incriminate Victor. He then has the idea to follow Alex because he is suspicious of someone who has turned his friend in. One of Cristi's superiors tells him he has gone too far with the investigation and that he should end it by arresting Victor. But Cristi continues his search, asking for papers about Alex and his family and beginning to follow Alex instead of Victor. He suspects that Alex has turned his best friend in because he wanted to get rid of Victor so that he could be with Dana, their female friend. But the investigation is stopped in its tracks by the boss, who manages to persuade Cristi to arrest Victor, in spite of Cristi's qualms. The investigation is a pretext for the filmmaker to explore issues such as justice, education and conscience.

**Love** The idea of love is explored in the movie through the relationship between Cristi and Anca, which has become distanced: they only see each other at night at home and rarely have dinner together. One night, when Cristi comes back from work, he has dinner by himself because his wife is listening endlessly to the same love song. From the lyrics and from the compulsiveness of the listening we can infer that Anca is perhaps thinking about another man and that she has strong feelings for him as expressed by the strongly emotional music.. Cristi had reproached her for listening to that song on another occasion and she promised that she wouldn't listen to it anymore. Cristi does not seem very affected by Anca's reverie, either. He continues to eat his dinner. There is no sign of affection or tenderness between them. In Cristi and Anca's case we witness a loveless marriage due to the heavy work load of both partners.

**Organization** The theme of organization appears in the movie in the hierarchy found in the police system Cristi works in. Cristi is a police officer and as such he has chiefs and commanders he has to obey. They give him orders he is supposed to follow. However, he does not do so for a good part of the movie because he considers the orders to be against his (otherwise unclear) sense of morality. Remember, he could not formulate a definition of conscience when asked to. The core issue here is that of the fallacy of laws and the inadequacy of the police system. Cristi intuitively feels that these laws are ineffective when it comes to assessing the case he is investigating, but he does not dare question these laws. When his chief reminds him of these laws, he is left without reply and eventually decides to follow orders. The movie thus shows the inefficiency of a system that goes by old, obsolete laws, which have little to do with today's world and the helplessness of those who work within that system.

**Rebellion** Cristi's rebellion towards his superiors marks a crucial point in his life. He becomes acutely aware of the limits and inefficacy of the justice system he serves, yet he cannot afford to live outside this system. It is what we could call a crisis of maturity, where Cristi has to make one of the most important decisions in his life. Under coercion and threat of losing his job, he gives in and probably becomes an unquestioning police officer who merely obeys his superior's commands. But his act of rebellion in the movie signifies his courage and determination to do something good. Although his superiors threaten and intimidate him several times, he does not give in until the moment he is threatened with being fired. Cristi's rebellion speaks of the need to work not by the rules of the system, but by the unwritten rules of conscience and the heart. For a while, Cristi is more dominated by these forces and this is why he continues the investigations in spite of his superior's order not to. But in the end, his rational or self-interest takes over and he abandons his project.

## SCENES

*CRISTI FOLLOWS VICTOR* A police officer, Cristi, follows a teenager, Victor, who is suspected of drug consumption and trafficking. Cristi follows Victor from his home until he reaches his school and gets lost in the crowd. We see dirty and shabby apartment buildings.



*VICTOR ARRIVES AT SCHOOL* Cristi keeps following Victor. While looking out for Victor, Cristi leaves the premises and goes into a building, where he works.



*CRISTI IN HIS OFFICE* Cristi's office is a cramped one. A colleague barges in to look for something among Cristi's office mate's stuff. Cristi tells him to stop searching and wait till their colleague returns to the office.



*THE FOOT TENNIS REQUEST* The colleague who had barged in then asks Cristi if he still plays foot tennis. Cristi says he does. The colleague asks if he can join the team. Cristi refuses.





**CRISTI WITH HIS OFFICE MATE** Cristi's office mate comes in and they have a conversation. They talk about their boss. His office mate is worried that the boss will vent his anger with Cristi on him. The dialogue is cordial.



**CRISTI TALKS TO ONE OF HIS SUPERIORS** Cristi goes to talk to one of his superiors to ask him for an extension of his investigation on the drug case. He also asks his superior to convince his boss to let him go on with the case. His superior tries to dissuade him and tells him he will not intervene with Cristi's boss.



*VICTOR, ALEX AND DANA* Cristi goes back to Victor's school. He sees three teenagers, Victor, Alex and Dani, talking and smoking cigarettes in the school yard. He continues his pursuit of them.



*CRISTI GOES BACK HOME* With no conclusive results after the day's investigation, Cristi returns home. He has dinner and eats alone in his kitchen. He seems to live alone.





**CRISTI STARTS FOLLOWING ALEX** The next day, Cristi resumes his search but he follows Alex instead of Victor. He follows Alex from school to his home, which looks like a rich house. Dana appears and enters the house. Cristi lingers on for a while.



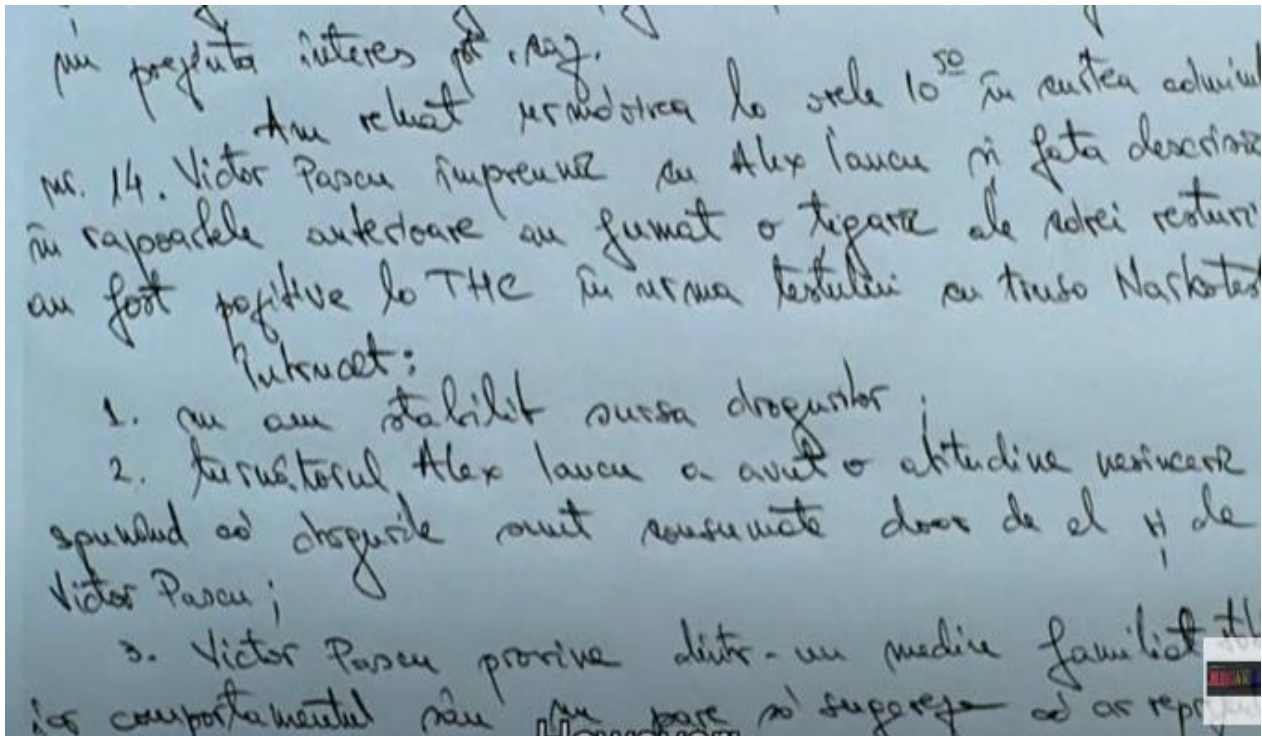
**CRISTI INSPECTS THE PREMISES** Cristi waits in front of Alex's house for a long time to see if something might happen. Nothing does. He inspects the shop and enters the premises.



**CRISTI GOES TO DANA'S APARTMENT** Then, Cristi follows Dana to her apartment. He learns that she has a brother who works abroad. Cristi goes to check Dana's family's mailbox.



**CRISTI WRITES HIS FIRST REPORT** Cristi then goes back to his office and starts writing the report on his current investigation. He says that no conclusive evidence has been found yet to incriminate Victor.



*CRISTI MEETS WITH ALEX* Cristi asks Alex to meet him in a bar. Cristi starts questioning Alex, but the latter responds curtly, providing no extra information. When Cristi asks Alex why he and Victor no longer get along, Alex says he wants to leave because he has homework to do.



*CRISTI'S WIFE LISTENS TO A ROMANTIC SONG* Back home, Cristi meets with his wife, who is entranced by a romantic song she has been listening to for hours on end. He goes to eat alone in the kitchen and just tells her that the dinner is really good. Anca, his wife, continues to listen to the song.





*THE SONG LYRICS* Cristi then has a beer and goes to sit by his wife's side. They have a conversation about the lyrics of the song. Cristi says he does not understand them. His wife tries to explain to him their figurative meaning. The lyrics talk about spring and love, and Anca tries to make the point that they are poetical.



*CRISTI GOES BACK TO ALEX'S HOUSE* The next day, Cristi goes back to Alex's house. He sees a woman (probably Alex's mother) go out of the house and get into a blue car. He writes down the car license plate number.



*CRISTI CONTINUES HIS INVESTIGATIONS* Cristi goes to one of his colleagues to ask her to find information about Alex and his father. She asks him if he would like some chocolate and then asks him when he needs the information. Cristi urges her to hurry up.



*CRISTI GOES TO OFFICE RECORDS* Cristi then goes to office records. Again, he asks his colleague to provide him the records of Alex and his family. Cristi tells his colleague it is an urgent matter.





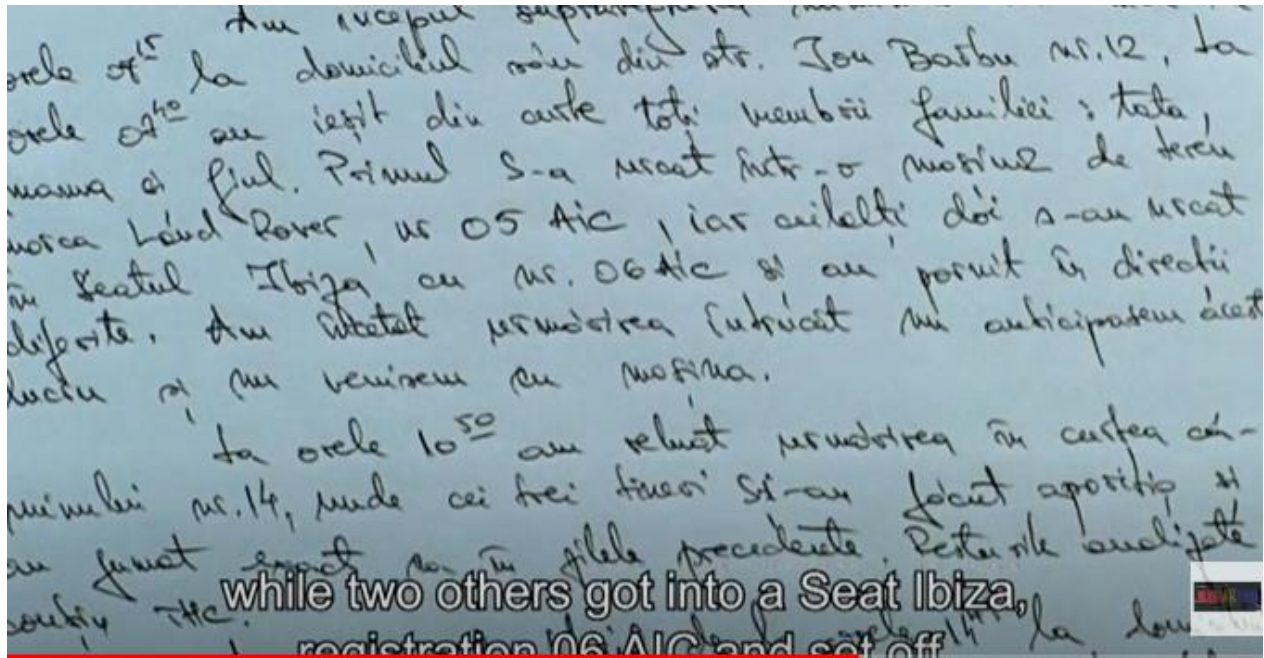
*CRISTI GOES TO ASK FOR MORE RECORDS* Cristi wants to look further into Alex's family's history and asks one of his colleagues to help him with the search. The colleague is not very cooperative but eventually Cristi manages to get what he needs. He learns that Alex's brother had been involved in a car accident a few years before.



*CRISTI CONTINUES TO FOLLOW ALEX AND HIS FAMILY* Cristi goes back to Alex's house and sees two expensive cars parked in front of it. They are owned by Alex's parents. Cristi keeps watching for something suspicious but nothing comes up.



**CRISTI WRITES HIS SECOND REPORT** Cristi goes back to his office and writes his second report. In it he describes his activity since beginning to follow Victor. He proposes that further investigations be made.



**CRISTI HAS A CONVERSATION WITH ANCA** Anca, who is a teacher of Romanian, signals to Cristi that there is a grammar mistake in his report. Cristi is surprised by this because he did not know about the new rules of grammar.



**CRISTI GOES TO HIS BOSS' OFFICE** After several times of avoiding a summons to go to his boss' office, Cristi finally has to go. He and his office mate go to the secretary, who asks them to wait. The boss asks to see the report before seeing them. They have to wait quite a long time.



**ANGHELACHE'S CASE FOR 'CONSCIENCE'** Finally in the boss' office, Cristi is asked why he refuses to arrest Victor. Cristi explains that he would not have a clear conscience should he arrest Victor without enough evidence. The boss asks Cristi to look up the word 'conscience' in the dictionary.





*CRISTI GIVES HIS DEFINITION OF CONSCIENCE* The boss asks Cristi's office mate to go and write on the blackboard Cristi's definition of 'conscience'. Cristi improvises a vague definition, and his office mate transcribes the exact words.



*THE ULTIMATUM* The boss threatens to fire Cristi if he refuses to arrest Victor. At this point, Cristi still says he won't do it. The boss gives Cristi until the next day to make up his mind.



*CRISTI GIVES IN* In the last scenes of the movie, we see Cristi organize the moment of Victor's arrest. He is professional and to the point. We infer he has decided to keep his job and not defend Victor anymore.

