

Modris: Latvian submission for Oscar Award

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This is the eighth time that Latvia, too, has submitted its film to compete for a nomination for the USA Academy Award *Oscar*. On 17 September, the expert committee, appointed by the National Film Centre, decided that it is going to be “Modris”, the debut feature film of director Juris Kursietis.

According to the Academy Award rules, two Latvian feature-length films were eligible for the nomination for *Best Foreign Language Film Award*. Both of these films were nominated in the National Film Festival *Lielais Kristaps* for Best Debut Award – “[The Lesson](#)” (dir. Andris Gauja) and “[Modris](#)” (dir. Juris Kursietis).

The decision was made by the committee of professional experts, appointed by the National Film Centre of Latvia Dita Rietuma, director of the NFC and film critic, Jānis Putniņš, film director and theorist, Ieva Romanova, board member of the Latvian Filmmakers Union and production designer, Sandis Voldiņš, State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture (in absentia), Kristīne Matīsa, film journalist and editor-in-chief of the journal *Kino Raksti* and Roberts Vinovskis, film producer. The committee was chaired by Zane Balčus, M.A. of film studies and director of Riga Film Museum, who also informed the media about the committee's unanimous decision to submit the film “Modris”.

Latvian, Greek and German co-production “Modris” is based on true events, it tells the story of a boy called Modris. He's a guy who goes to school, has a girlfriend and some good friends. He has a small gambling addiction, which makes his relationship with his mother difficult. It's also hard because the two of them live alone and the mother doesn't miss a chance to remind him that his father is in prison and that Modris has a bad gene. Their relationship boils over when, in the middle of a Nordic winter, Modris pawns his mother's electric heater in trying to squeeze a win from a slot machine. She betrays him to the police and Modris is

sentenced to two years' probation. That is when his adventures with the Latvian justice system begin and he sets a new goal: to find the father he has never met.

The film has won awards in international festivals and in the National Film Festival *Lielais Kristaps* in 2014 (seven nominations and the Award for the Best Debut). The Oscar Award Committee unanimously praised the performance of Kristaps Pikša, the young non-professional actor, in the leading role, as well as the film's homogeneous style and its immediate link to the reality. The film has been made by an international team – besides [Juris Kursietis](#), who has studied filmmaking in the UK, the team includes Bogumil Gofrejev, a Polish cinematographer, Yorgos Mavropsaridis, a Greek editor, and others.

Currently the film “Modris” is available to the Baltic viewers in the internet rental website vimeo.com at any time and on any PC in HD quality, but, shortly before Christmas, it will be released in the DVD format in the series *Latvian Film* of the platform *Best Baltic*.

This year, for the first time, Latvia has even two films which can enter the competition for the USA Academy Awards – till 1 October, the film *Castratus the Boar*, directed by brothers Raitis and Lauris Ābeles, may also be submitted for an Oscar nomination in the category for Best Short Film. In March, 2015, this film was awarded *Grand Prix* in the Tampere International Short Film Festival (Finland), which is included in the USA Academy list of prestigious film festivals – an award in one of these festivals grants the film eligibility to the Oscar-qualifying competition.

The 88th *Oscar Awards* ceremony, which will celebrate the most outstanding cinematic accomplishments of 2015, will be held on 28 February, 2016, in Los Angeles; the nominees will be announced on 14 January, 2016.

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