

Welcome to Liberland

The Newest Country on the Map



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Fantasy or fact? Vít Jedlicka, a Czech economist and politician, uncovered an area of Europe that is technically under no sovereign government and declared it the Free Republic of Liberland. Here citizens benefit from maximum liberties and minimum limitations. Some 500,000 people have expressed interest in becoming citizens of the new country. However, the entire nationhood has been called into question by neighboring Croatia, which threatens to wipe Liberland off the map. Liberlanders remain stubbornly defiant and patriotic in the face of opposition and refuse to bow to the Croatian threats.



On April 13, 2015, beneath sunny skies in balmy weather, several Czech citizens gathered on a stretch of muddy marshland along the banks of the Danube. They were at a spot right between Serbia and Croatia and prepared to mark a momentous occasion. It was a cool day and the trees were just beginning to blossom, with the first leaves and buds already showing. Everything conspired to add to the charm of the moment.

At the predetermined time one of the men removed a large flag and posted it in the ground. Then he read the following declaration:

We, the members of the committee that is preparing the state of the Free Republic of Liberland, do hereby proclaim the following: We who have the right to decide for ourselves what we want in



The tract between Serbia and Croatia where the new state was created.



The new Liberland passport (right).

life and the right of self-governing, do proclaim the state of the Free Republic of Liberland. The republic is a free and independent state. As such it has full rights to defend itself, make peace treaties, form alliances, institute commerce and has whatever rights independent governments have. As a member of the international body of nations we hereby make it our duty to obey international laws that all countries must obey.

With that, the world's newest country, Liberland, came into being. That same day, they issued a press release informing the international media of Liberland's existence.

Vít Jedlička, a Czech economist and politician, was chosen as president. Although Jedlička humbly stated that he did not seek the presidency, he accepted the position after other members of the group chose him. The new president was fully empowered to send diplomatic messages to neighboring countries, as well as the United Nations and any other country, to notify them of Liberland's existence. The press release also notified the public that the new country was accepting applications for citizenship. Anyone interested in more information was directed to contact the country's offices in Prague.

The press release also plainly gave the new country's exact location, lest anyone consider encroaching on its borders: "Liberland is located on the shores of the Danube River, between the countries of Croatia and Serbia. The territory is not under the rulership of either land and therefore belongs to no one and is *terra nullius*."

The Homestead Principle

Terra nullius is Latin for "no man's land." There is a widely-accepted notion in law called the Homestead Principle, whereby property that has no owner, *terra nullius*, can be taken over simply by occupying it. That means anyone can move in and declare it his property. This principle has been upheld time and time and again at various



President Vít Jedlička after planting the flag in the new country of Liberland.
Right: President Jedlička waving his new country's flag.



international conferences in both the Western and Eastern hemispheres.

Before modern times, ownerless land was common and the rule of *terra nullius* remained in constant use. Wars were sometimes fought when two owners laid claim to the same previously unoccupied territory.

Throughout history many countries expanded their territory using the Homestead Principle. Such was the case with the original 13 colonies of the United States and virtually all of Canada. Most of Australia was occupied in this manner during the mid-1800s, even though today aboriginal tribes who preceded the arrival of Europeans are not so happy about the Homestead Principle. Though the aborigines sued the government of Australia in international court and had the Homestead Principle and the concept of *terra nullius* reexamined in minute detail, it remains an accepted mode of land acquisition.

Today, almost the entire globe is settled and technology allows nations to establish extremely precise borders. The minutest isles in the remotest parts of the planet can be readily identified by the government they belong to, making discussion of ownership of new territories mostly moot.

The only part of the world where there are still vast stretches of land that no one has yet laid claim to are in Antarctica. There at the South Pole the ground is covered by a layer of ice thousands of feet thick in some places. Not the greatest place to create a new country. Practically speaking, the only

viable option for creating a new country—other than breaking away from an existing one—is when a government relinquishes its rights to part of its land. But how often does that happen?

Well, that's exactly what happened in the case of Liberland.

Vít Jedlička

Many European countries have joined the European Union, or EU, among them the Czech Republic. One of many Czech citizens very unhappy that his country became part of the EU is Vít Jedlička. A Euroskeptic, as those who are against the European Union are known, he believed that it would be much better for his country to remain independent of the EU.

Vít Jedlička is also a libertarian, meaning he possesses a political ideology very much against government mixing too much into



Under the Homestead Principle, a farmer becomes owner of an ownerless field when he plows it for his own use (illustration).