



Episode 440: Liberland: A New Libertarian Country?

Guest: Vit Jedlicka & Tom Walls

WOODS: Let me start with Vit. I want to talk about Liberland, which is quite an extraordinary thing. First of all, tell us where it's situated. And then I want to know how do you start a country.

JEDLICKA: It'd pretty easy. You just find a spot that is not claimed by any country, so that way you don't interfere with anybody else's interests, and you claim it.

WOODS: Now, where are we talking about? Where is this?

JEDLICKA: It is some 30 kilometers below the Hungarian border between Croatia and Serbia. It's a nice piece of land on the Danube River, because the Danube River is a sort of natural border between those two countries, but these two countries couldn't make up their mind where the proper border between the countries goes. And Serbia always said in the past, and they still keep saying, that the borderline is in the middle of the Danube River, and Croatia still keeps insisting that Liberland or this piece of land is also not their part. So for some 24 years, there was no interest in the land. I looked it up; I took a deep study in some of the academic works that were written on the topic, and I found out, yes, this is really no-man's land. It's one of the very last pieces on the Earth.

WOODS: What's the size of the territory? And then maybe Tom can translate that into the English system for us here.

JEDLICKA: It's seven kilometers, so it's three or four square miles. It's three times larger than Monaco.

WOODS: Okay, so it's not actually the smallest state in the world.

JEDLICKA: No, it's actually like number 10 in the world, if you do the chart of the smallest states. So it's pretty big if you consider that. But the thing is, we really do have some 340,000 who were just afforded citizenship, and they registered on our website, and some 45,000 now finished the whole process, and they registered for the citizenship all the way. So if we accepted everybody, we would be larger than Iceland now, concerning the population.

WOODS: Given that this is, as you say, a no-man's land, does that mean that there's no development, there's no building? Is it completely empty?

JEDLICKA: Well you know, doing that is a little bit out of the ordinary. I would say nobody for some 100 years managed to create a country on no-man's land. And it's just obviously something which the countries around are quite curious about. So to understand the issue, we can't reach the land right now, because what happens is that Croatia totally blocked the entrance to the territory, at some week after I announced the creation of land. It was freely accessible from the Croatian side — I could go there even with my car — but when the article appeared on CNN that the new country was created, when the *Washington Post* asked the embassy of Croatia in Washington, what do they think about Liberland, they said they don't take Liberland seriously. And then they put like 100 policemen around the borders to protect their border to Liberland, which was very nice of them in a way.

WOODS: It gets you tremendous publicity, and it obviously shows they're lying when they say they're not interested in it. They obviously are very, very interested in it.

WALLS: Yeah, Tom, if I may say, one thing that's very interesting: the area that we claim as Liberland does not lie on the official Croatian survey administration maps. It's outside of their borders. So the Croatian police are treating it as sort of this weird, as sort of a vortex, as if the whole area were a border. So when we try to approach from the Croatian side, okay, that's fine; that's a border. But when we try to approach from the river on a boat, they also claim it's sort of a border area. So we're trying to get some clarification from the Croatian authorities on that matter.

WOODS: Is there any other way you can enter?

JEDLICKA: Well, the best way how you can enter and you can stay there and have a party there is with a diplomatic passport. That way you can really enjoy the weekend. But on the other hand, you can always enter Liberland, because when you go by boat, you go by the Danube River, you are in Liberland. So when we do these parties, or do these celebrations during the weekend, and we take our boats, we take them to Liberland, all the people are in fact in Liberland, because they are in the territory which is claimed by Liberland at the moment. Because when the people are on the boat, they are protected by the Danube Treaty, which allows everybody to travel freely on this river.

WALLS: Yeah, also, right now the land is completely uninhabited. There's an old hunting lodge on there, but it's in disrepair. And the Croats are acting in this very strange way; if I may borrow a metaphor of yours, Tom, which I like so much: they're acting as if, if they allow us to settle there, the Earth would come spinning off its axis and go hurtling into the sun. We don't understand why they're acting like this. It would be a great economic boom to the area. We would employ local people. And we just want to foster good relations with all parties involved.

WOODS: Now tell me, of the 340,000 or so people who applied for citizenship, you're able to tell, presumably, where these people are coming from, how they're geographically distributed? Are they mostly Europeans? Are they mostly Americans? I could imagine that, given how big the libertarian movement is here. Where are they all coming from?

JEDLICKA: Well, we've got more than 6,000 people from the U.S. And they come from all around the world basically, but we really created a large interest in the Middle East and in Egypt and in Turkey. So maybe like 40% of the overall applicants come from this area. And then the interest has spread across the world, because even the biggest media agencies are informed about the creation of Liberland, because of the coverage by Metro, by Associated Press. So everybody around the world basically got to know that Liberland existed, and yes, people wanted to have this new citizenship as a possibility to travel, to be more free. And then many of these people probably even liked the idea that we are going to create the minimum state, that we are always trying to find the minimum amount of taxes and regulation necessary for society to function.

WALLS: Yeah, Tom, we've also received a large amount of interest and support from the libertarian community, the expatriate community, the Voice & Exit folks; also, the seasteading community is very supportive. I think Peter C. Earle, the Mises Scholar who wrote a book on the microstate of Moresnet in the 19th century is one of our supporters. The Bitcoin and cryptocurrency people are also involved. So we've got some interesting people on board with our project.

WOODS: No doubt. Isn't there a practical problem with so many people coming from so many places that there'll be a language barrier with everybody?

JEDLICKA: Basically our official language is English and Czech, but we don't use Czech now too often. And yes, the project is very accessible for people who speak English, but we are also trying to run the website in Serbian and Croatian to be able to show our ideas also to our neighboring countries, which are most important. But just let me get back to this issue with the territory itself.

WOODS: Please.

JEDLICKA: For us, in a way, this approach of Croatia is helpful, because it's really helped us to constitute the government, constitute the embassies, organize this stuff, develop the proper constitution, which we are working on now, and we will be working on until the first general election. So Serbia said, this is great; this is not our territory; you can do whatever you want there. Croatia just blocks us out and doesn't comment on the topic anymore. But this really gives us time and space to really create, let's say, a minimum powerful state. You know what I mean.

WALLS: Yeah, also, Serbia has actually indirectly helped us. Right now, Serbia has really intractable problems on their southern border with Kosovo, etc. Hungary is putting up a border fence with them because of all the refugees coming through there.

But the Serbians did issue a statement a month or two ago referring to Liberland as — well, they said they basically didn't take it seriously. They called it “neozbiljan postupak,” which is Serbian for “trivial or unserious matter.” But they also said Liberland is not formed on their territory, so that helped us in that regard.

JEDLICKA: But the situation with Serbia is changing, and it has actually been very good from the very start, and we do have now high officials or people very high in the Serbian hierarchy who are now citizens of Liberland. And I might go public about it pretty soon; this person already said he wants to be open about it, and he really will help us to create borders with Serbia. So we are very far off in the negotiations about this topic, especially with Serbia, and we can say that they are supportive of the project, just as they said that they don't mind the creation of Liberland, because it's not formed on their territory.

WOODS: Now, I know that Americans hearing this — at least some of my listeners anyway — will have a certain — although no doubt be enthusiastic for your project — they'll have a certain bit of skepticism, because it'll sound like a very familiar story: that we're going to have a constitution that's going to keep the government limited. And we'll think, well, that's how things started out in the United States, and there doesn't seem to be any way to stop it from spinning into exactly like every regime that exists in the world, where you don't have a minimum state. What can you do about that?

JEDLICKA: Well, we are very aware of that, but we made the maximum effort to protect that from happening. And we really took the best parts of the American Constitution, Swiss Constitution, and some parts of Estonian Constitution, and we added some fifty more restrictions to the Constitution, and we really made the system in a way that the Constitution is almost impossible to change — like, all the Assembly would have to vote for the change. So we made a large effort to make this, not only for 200 years — and I started the country on the 13th of April to honor the legacy of Thomas Jefferson. And he really made a great job. I mean, consider 200 years of relative freedom in a country. So I think if we do this project a little bit longer, some say 1,000 years — I don't want to elaborate on this too much, but I think we are able to make a system which will be able to sustain freedom for a very long period of time.

WOODS: If I were to move there, if you were to take me as a citizen, and I were to move there, I would be moving to a place that would require an awful lot of work to get started. It would almost be like what the original Americans faced when they first came to North America, and that seems like a lot of work. Let's imagine that this is successful, and 30 years from now there's plenty of places to live and work. And suppose I went there at that time. What would you hope I would encounter in terms of taxes? What would I be expected to pay? What would you want to be the top amount —

JEDLICKA: I really think that we are able to put it in the Constitution and keep it there for very long, that the taxes are voluntary, that everything the state wants to do must be fundraised through crowdfunding campaigns.

WOODS: Wow, wow, okay, I didn't realize that. Okay, that's very, very important. Okay.

JEDLICKA: This is a new approach, and it's not in the Constitution yet, but I think in the version 3.0, we will have that there directly. And I don't think there is a necessity for obligatory tax systems. And I think it is sort of a new idea, even in the libertarian field — you know, everybody is talking about land tax — at least we have to have land tax. I'm telling, why? We are so small; the government will be so limited. And for example, I don't know if you've read the Constitution, but government will not be able to make any laws on marriage, no laws on public education, no laws on health care. So if government will not be able to legislate on these things, then maybe it will be able to maybe crowdfund some of these things these people wanted. But all this money will have to come in a voluntary way, not in an obligatory fashion.

WOODS: Okay, so I think that is a much, much more minimal state than the typical minimal state.

WALLS: Yes.

WOODS: And that, so when you used that term earlier, I jumped to conclusions that I should not have. I find that extremely interesting. So I guess it's obvious what you can learn by looking at other societies these days, when it comes to sitting down and deciding how this one would work. What would be the most obvious things that you would want to emulate or avoid?

WALLS: It's real interesting, Tom. We're setting up transportation. Since a lot of the activists are from the Czech Republic, we've set up charter flights from Prague to the nearest airport. And basically it's known as Air Liberland. And actually some of our critics said, well, how can you call it Air Liberland? You don't own the planes. Well, the response is we don't believe in state-owned modes of transportation.

WOODS: How about that?

JEDLICKA: The thing is, this is a completely separated company from the state. It has nothing to do with it, apart from the fact that the guy who started it is a good friend of mine. But if the company has some trouble, it's not connected to the state anyhow, and actually, it's running great so far. I'm always going there to Liberland, and I have like five newspapers with me. This time it's going to be Bloomberg and Euronews. And they do; they basically pay for my trip to Liberland, which is great.

WOODS: Are there — well, let me ask — I was going to ask about resources, but it's such a small place. Have you talked to Doug Casey? This sounds like it would be right up his alley. Are you familiar with him?

JEDLICKA: Yeah, I've got his book here on the table, actually. We are speaking, and I go through it piece by piece. I've been reading his newsletters for like 10 years maybe now, and I also got to know that he also introduced this system where people will be

able to co-invest with the state into the infrastructure. And we also want to introduce this as soon as possible. We've got really a lot of IT jobs ahead, and one of the things that's a possibility that Doug Casey was talking about for many years to give people the possibility to co-invest in the different government projects.

WOODS: Gentlemen, what's the timeframe you're hoping for? In other words, by how many years from now will people, you hope, be settling there and things will be underway?

JEDLICKA: I think we are able to set up embassies all around the world, in like most of the civilized world, by the end of the year. And by this time and the organization really goes strong in terms of diplomatic connection, we will be able to get first recognitions if we are lucky. But I have a possibility, and we are already in contact with maybe like 10 heads of state at the moment of very small nations, but they are still nations who could recognize us. But I don't feel any pressure at the moment to push for recognition right away. What we really need to show is the ability to organize our stuff, to organize our diplomats, organize the embassies and also the government, to prove to the world that even these concepts can work outside Liberland. We don't really need the land at the moment to show how Liberland can prosper.

WOODS: Isn't that a gigantic expense, though? Maintaining embassies in all the countries of the world for a country that is still coming into existence? I mean, maybe if it were flourishing already, you would have people who would be so pleased about it, they'd be glad to crowdfund this. But where would the funds come for a staggering project like that?

JEDLICKA: This is based on voluntarism. All these people actively asked about it. I haven't invested into my French embassy — or I mean, I haven't invested any state funds for the French embassy or for the United States embassy, but I think both of these embassies already function better than the Czech embassy in the United States or in France. It's very cool, you know.

WALLS: (laughing) Thank you.

WOODS: Nice, nice. All right, Tom, tell us what's going on with regard to publicizing, talking about Liberland in the United States in the coming weeks.

WALLS: Okay, well, first off let me say I've been active as a libertarian for a long time. Started out at UF with the College Libertarians — total hotbed of activity site. I got my start a long time ago and know a lot of people in the movement, so I'm reaching out to people: people who are going to be at Freedom Fest — organizations, free market think tanks — people who have connections in the political realm and possibly the diplomatic realm, as well as investing. We are getting a tremendous response so far.

We're going to bring Vit to Freedom Fest in Las Vegas from July 8 to 11, and he'll be speaking on Saturday — I think, is it 10:30am? I have to check with Mark Skousen on

that. But he is slated to speak on Saturday at Freedom Fest at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas. After that, we're going to bring him to Washington, D.C., where we're going to have some events. I think we were planning something at a think tank, and we're going to have maybe dinner at a restaurant where supporters and future Liberland citizens can come and meet Vit.

We're also looking at some events, maybe I think, if we can put it into his schedule; we've got a New York date where we've got some great media opportunities there, as well as a chance to meet with some of the supporters we've heard from already. And also New Hampshire — I think, Vit, you have a connection with New Hampshire; you spent some time there as a young man.

JEDLICKA: Yes, I've been there; I've spent a half year there in Boston and the area, so I've got good friends who I think will also be helpful to the project, who are greatly into this, for the freedom. So I hope to meet them, and I really hope to meet a good friend of mine, and now a member of European Parliament, Petr Mach. He is just by coincidence on a diplomatic mission, or I think I'd call it a fundraising tour for more freedom in Europe, in Washington. But he's there at exactly the same time as I am. He will be accompanied by Nigel Farage and other important people, who I already know from my past. So I also hope to maybe meet this group and do some interesting discussions with them as well.

WOODS: Are you going to have the schedule for your July events in the U.S. — and just for people — people listen to these episodes far, far away from when I record them; this is 2015 — can they find this at the Liberland website, so they know when you're going to be where?

JEDLICKA: Exactly. Everything we plan is already in the calendar. It's in the News section, as well as the Facebook account and official statements. It's everything on the first page of the news section, all the events that we plan that are public are already there. And you can see, I've got conferences now planned until the end of the year, and I'm going to United Kingdom to speak there in the university even next year. So my schedule is filling up very intensively, and I've got now people who are joining me for the mission of setting up proper embassies around the world. I've got a person now who will travel to 22 countries in the following days, and he will help me to set up embassies all across Asia. So we really need to develop this network of people who are for more liberty, because there is none at the moment.

WOODS: Well, it's very exciting; this whole project. Before we talk to Tom, I want to remind people of today's show notes page; this is Episode 440, so the show notes page is TomWoods.com/440. We'll of course link to Liberland.org; we'll have the Facebook, the Twitter, everything that you would want to link to related to this, I will be linking to on that page. Tom, you wanted to say something.

WALLS: Yeah, I just wanted to point out that the founders of Liberland and its supporters and the team and the U.S. team especially, we're all very hardcore Austrians, hardcore libertarians. I myself attended a number of Mises seminars in the

past, and the most exciting one was in Vienna, where I got to go to the Grüner Anker where Ludwig von Mises had the Mises Circle, and have dinner with Murray Rothbard. That was a real exciting time.

WOODS: Wow, yeah, that's an exciting time. Wow, good for you.

WALLS: And when I lived over there, I got to develop my skills in different languages and you know, I worked at the U.S. embassy in Berlin, so my experience with diplomacy is there. So it's a real exciting time to where my interests in the idea of liberty and international relations come together, and I'm going to use that motivation to make Liberland a success in the U.S. and abroad.

JEDLICKA: Since we are talking about Murray Rothbard, there are two books that might have had the biggest influence over me and maybe the creation of Liberland: that might be Murray Rothbard's *Anatomy of the State* and then Frederic Bastiat's *The Law*. And I'm very excited to tell you that we've been able to celebrate his birthday yesterday in a proper way here in Prague, in the biggest club, because we got the full support of the owner of the club for the idea of Liberland, as well as for celebrating Bastiat's birthday. So it was a big event, and it's an exciting time. We are pushing forward these authors in places they would never be able to get otherwise.

WOODS: Well, it's a very, very interesting and exciting project. That crowdfunding point that you made about how to avoid taxation just shocked me. I guess I hadn't realized that about this project. So this is really, really a sweeping and radical repudiation of the existing state system in a very interesting and refreshing way. Well, best of luck, gentlemen; I hope your tour of the U.S. is a successful and fruitful one – and indeed, all the speaking that you have coming up around the world. And perhaps we can check in with you sometime in the future and see how things are going.

JEDLICKA: Oh, I really wish we could meet you on our way to the States, as you are one of my most favorite, let's say, libertarian figures in the United States, so I really wish we could maybe speak for an hour or so if I get to go the States.

WOODS: Well, that would be great. I'm going to check out your schedule, because I'll be traveling a little bit in July to places that are, let's say, more inhabited than Kansas, where I live now, but I'll be in New York and maybe somewhere else during that time, and it would be great to be able to meet up. But thanks to both of you gentlemen for your time today.

JEDLICKA: Thank you very much.

WALLS: Thank you, Tom; it was a pleasure.