

The Free Republic of Verdis: How a 14-year-old Australian student became president of his own country

On May 30, 2019, then-14-year-old Australian student Daniel Jackson founded his own (micro) nation in the Balkans, located between Croatia and Serbia. The country covers just half a square kilometer and, to this day, has over 400 residents and 2,000 internet-based citizens. But how is it possible for a young student to establish a (micro) nation and crown himself president? In this article, we take a closer look at the creation of the Free Republic of Verdis.



The official flag of the Free Republic of Verdis. Source:

Verdisgov.org

What is a micronation?

Europe is known as the continent where several micronations exist. These are extremely small countries that often emerge because the local population feels and behaves differently from neighboring countries, often for historical reasons. For example, countries like Andorra and Liechtenstein are sovereign states, even though both are located between two other countries (France and Spain for Andorra, Switzerland and Austria for Liechtenstein).

There are also micronations founded for religious reasons, such as Vatican City (covered in another article). Additionally, there are nations that exist but are not yet officially recognized, yet still seek independence, such as Catalonia and Transnistria (also covered in another article). The Free Republic of Verdis falls into this last category. What makes this “country” unique is that it did not arise from cultural or social conflicts, but rather from a joke that got out of hand.

How do you found your own country?

Countries and borders often change. Former nations fade away—look at Yugoslavia (now Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro) or Zaire (now the Central African Republic / Democratic Republic of Congo), to name a few examples. While some countries have claimed pieces of land from each other, like Crimea (Ukraine and Russia), nearly every piece of land is today claimed or assigned to a country.

Australian student Daniel Jackson, however, found a small piece of land that no country had claimed. It was a tiny area along the Danube River called Pocket 3, a border strip between Croatia and Serbia. If neither country claims or assigns it, you can—at least theoretically—officially establish your own country. Most people wouldn't dare do this, but Daniel Jackson seized the opportunity. On May 30, 2019, he founded the Free Republic of Verdis and made himself president.



The size of the Free Republic of Verdis. Source: Verdisgov.org

Making the Free Republic of Verdis possible

But how is it possible that neither Serbia nor Croatia ever claimed this piece of land? This can be traced back to the fall of Yugoslavia. After the Croatian War of Independence, Croats and Serbs were heavily focused on defining the borders of both countries. To prevent future geopolitical conflicts, neither side dared to claim this tiny strip of land. This allowed not only Daniel Jackson to establish the Free Republic of Verdis but also enabled the founding of the Free Republic of Liberland in a nearly identical way.

Daniel Jackson, however, took both Croats and Serbs into account when designing the national emblem. The square shapes in the emblem are inspired by the Croatian flag, and it features a Serbian cross. The wavy line symbolizes the Danube River, and the stork is the country's national bird.



The coat of arms of Verdis. Source: verdisgov.org

Who is Daniel Jackson?

Now that we know how the Free Republic of Verdis came to be, the question arises: how could a 14-year-old Australian student become both the founder and president of a country?

Daniel Jackson was born on December 7, 2004, in Upper Ferntree Gully, Australia. He completed his secondary education at Waverley Christian College in Australia and quickly developed political ambitions. In 2019, when Daniel was just 14, he and a few friends discovered a remarkable fact: there was a piece of land between Serbia and Croatia that had remained unclaimed for over 30 years due to the fall of Yugoslavia. Realizing that they could legally claim this land, they went ahead, and thus the Free Republic of Verdis was founded by a 14-year-old boy.

Six years later, Daniel Jackson is now 21 years old and still the self-proclaimed president of the Free Republic of Verdis. Due to issues with Croatian authorities, he does not reside in Verdis but lives with his parents in Kent, England. In addition to running his “country,” Jackson earns money as a freelance game developer for the popular platform Roblox.



Daniel Jackson behind the national flag of his “country.” Source:

theguardian.com

In Conclusion

The Free Republic of Verdis tells a truly unique story in the world. Of course, the story of the Free Republic of Liberland is almost exactly the same; however, it was founded by a local Czech activist, not by a 14-year-old boy from Australia. From its own “country” to its own government and flag, Verdis has everything a fully-fledged nation should have.

Since its founding in 2019, more than 10,000 people have applied to become citizens, though to date there are only 400 official citizens of the Free Republic of Verdis. If you’re curious and want to learn more about the country, it has its own website at www.verdisgov.org, where you can find all the information about the nation.

And so, a 14-year-old Australian student—now 21—became the president of his very own country.

Curious after reading this article, or want to explore more unique stories like this? Check out my other articles at www.achterdewereldkaart.com.