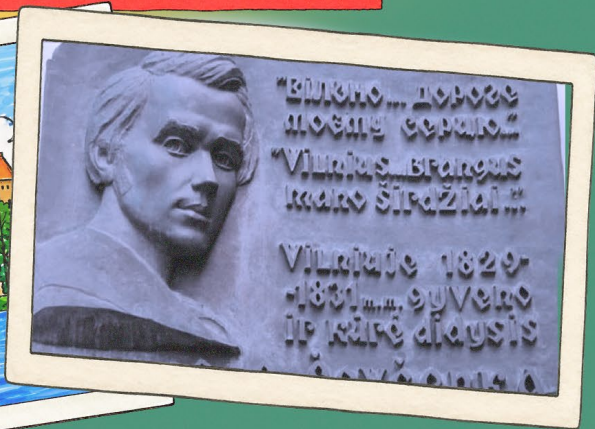
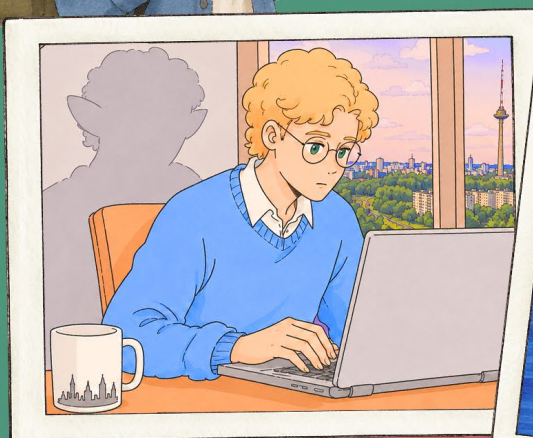


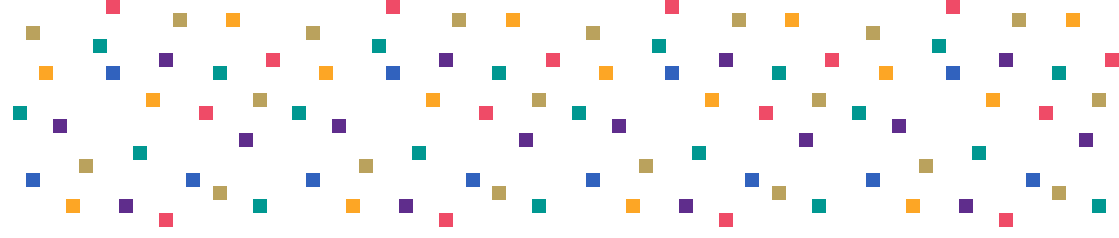
DISCOVERING THE WORLD TOGETHER



LITHUANIA

A COUNTRY WHERE
ELVES LIVE





LITHUANIA: a country where elves live

Discovering the world together

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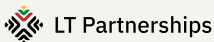
The colour of the strip at the bottom of the cover indicates the recommended age for reading this book.

 **6+**

 **8+**

 **11+**

 **14+**



EMBASSY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA
IN UKRAINE

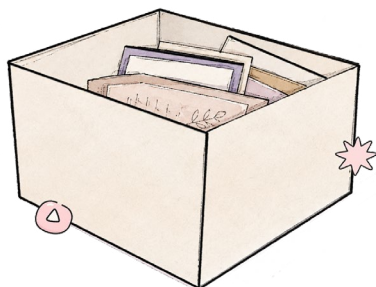


LITHUANIA: A COUNTRY WHERE ELVES LIVE

Discovering the world together



My shiny keepsake box holds a small collection of postcards from all over the world. Each one feels like a ticket to a new adventure. Pick one, and you're in a mountain principality. Choose another—you're wandering across northern islands. The next might carry you far across the ocean.



By now, I know for sure that a postcard is never just a pretty view. It's a story—about ancient castles, surprising traditions and inventions, or people living hundreds, even thousands, of kilometres from Ukraine. Somehow, it can make distant places and people feel much closer than the map suggests.

BUT THE POSTCARD IN MY HAND IS DIFFERENT.



It comes from Vilnius.
Lithuania!

At once, I picture medieval towers, the narrow streets of the Old Town, amber, the Baltic Sea and pine forests scented with resin. I expect a story about knights, Baltic legends or ancient mysteries. But the first lines of the message leave me puzzled.

I read them again.

Hi, Marta!

Greetings from Vilnius, Lithuania's capital!



This may surprise you, but elves live in Lithuania. And I'm proud to say that one of them is my dad.

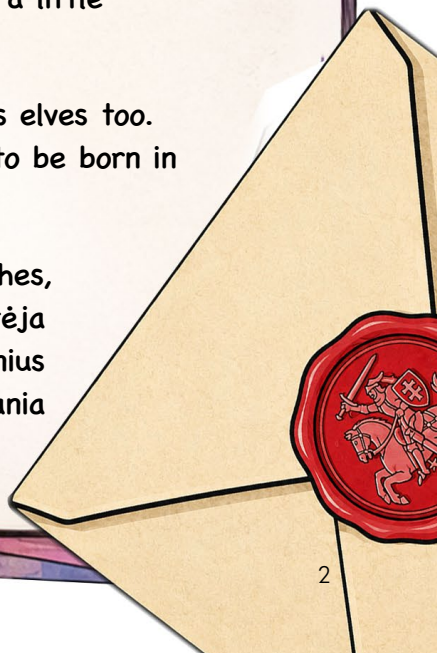
And no, I don't mean wizards with pointed ears and bows. Our elves look different. They might study at university, visit a library, or sit in a café with a laptop.

Lithuanian elves don't have magic wands. Instead, they have a superpower that matters just as much in today's world.

Want to know who they are—and why Lithuanians call them elves? You'll have to do a little detective work.

By the way, I think Ukraine needs elves too. And guess what? You don't have to be born in Lithuania to become one.

Best wishes,
Matėja
LT-01103 Vilnius
Republic of Lithuania



ELVES? SERIOUSLY?!

I hold the postcard closer and study the picture on the back. Maybe this is some kind of joke that only Lithuanians understand? Then I spot it: the boy's shadow really does have **pointed ears!**

"Okay, I think, either Matėja has a very strange sense of humour, or I know **absolutely nothing about Lithuania**".



I read the message again. No. It isn't a joke. Matėja sounds completely serious.

Now I'm not just curious about amber and old castles.

I have to find out who these **Lithuanian elves** are.

Are there girl elves too?

I smile at the thought and look back at the postcard.

Still, one question sticks in my head:

**ALL RIGHT,
LITHUANIA.
NOW YOU'VE
REALLY GOT MY
ATTENTION!**

I'm not exactly a detective, but I know where to start: with the facts.



To solve the mystery of Lithuania's elves, I need to start with Lithuania itself.

I open my notebook, go online and start digging.



Why does Matėja think Lithuania needs elves?



SO, HERE IS WHAT I FIND.

LITHUANIA AT A GLANCE

Official name: Republic of Lithuania

Capital: Vilnius

Area: 65,300 km²

Population: 2.9 million (2025)

System of government: republic

Territorial structure: unitary state

Currency: euro

Official language: Lithuanian

Country calling code: +370



Trakai Island Castle

Famous places and cultural highlights:

- Trakai Island Castle
- Vilnius Old Town
- Gediminas Castle Tower
- Lithuania's national parks
- the Curonian Spit and its shifting sand dunes

Gediminas Castle Tower



- Lake Žuvintas
- the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights
- the Amber Museum
- the Museum of Ancient Beekeeping

Traditional Costumes



Tips for visitors:

- ☑ Wander through the narrow streets of Vilnius Old Town
- ☑ Try:

cepelinai
(large potato dumplings
filled with meat)



skilandis



kibinai
(meat-filled pastries)



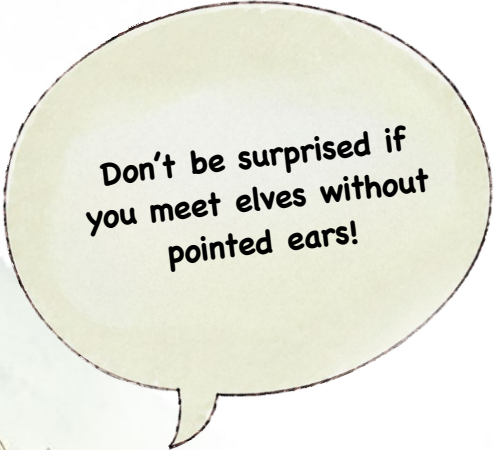
smoked Baltic fish



- ☑ Visit a folk festival or traditional fair. Lithuanians take great care to preserve their folk traditions.
- ☑ Don't be surprised to meet elves without pointed ears 😄

I look over my notes. Lithuania might be much smaller than Ukraine, but somehow my list of places to see has already spilled onto a second page.

Then one final tip catches my eye:



**Don't be surprised if
you meet elves without
pointed ears!**

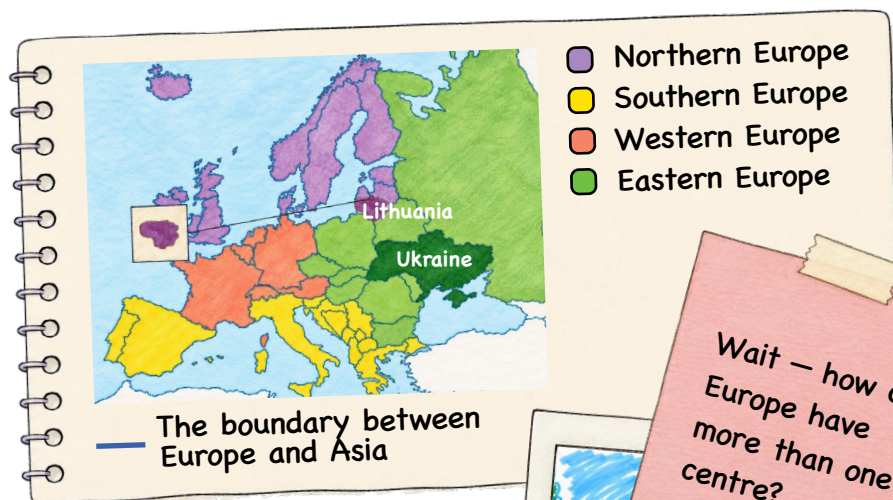


I stop.
Okay. Matėja
definitely isn't joking.

HOW THE COUNTRIES DIFFER

At the Centre of Europe

In geography class, we learned that Ukraine is in Eastern Europe and Lithuania is in Northern Europe.



I'm looking at the map, trying to work out the shortest route from Kyiv to Vilnius, when I notice something strange. Both Ukraine and Lithuania have places that claim to be **the geographical centre of Europe**.

Wait — how can Europe have more than one centre?



The Gates of Dawn,
Vilnius, Lithuania

In Ukraine, one of these places is near **the village of Dilove in the Zakarpattia region.**

In 1887, experts from the Imperial-Royal Military Geographical Institute in Vienna took measurements there and put up **a monument with the words: "This is a permanent, exact, eternal place..."**.

These days, many travellers start their journeys through the Carpathians right here. I absolutely love to travel. How about you? But how can you not get lost here? I'm looking at photos on my phone screen...

WOW! 

This is Purnuškės, just 26 kilometres north of Vilnius. Apparently, this is one of the places considered to be the geographical centre of Europe! There's even a monument marking the spot. And these signs point towards Kyiv, Paris and even Tokyo.



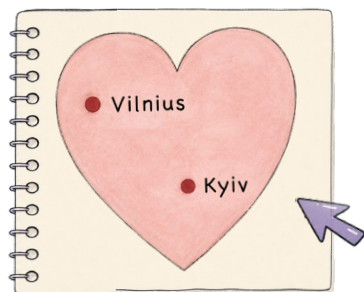
But if this is the centre of Europe, what about Lithuania?



The Geographical Centre of Europe,
Dilove Village, Ukraine

I keep searching.

It turns out there isn't one simple answer. It depends on how you measure Europe—and even on where you decide Europe begins and ends. Different methods can lead to different spots.



Okay. That explains a lot. I draw a huge heart in my notebook and mark two dots inside it: Kyiv and Vilnius.

The geographers can argue about the exact coordinates. I like the idea that both countries have found their own way to **the heart of Europe**.

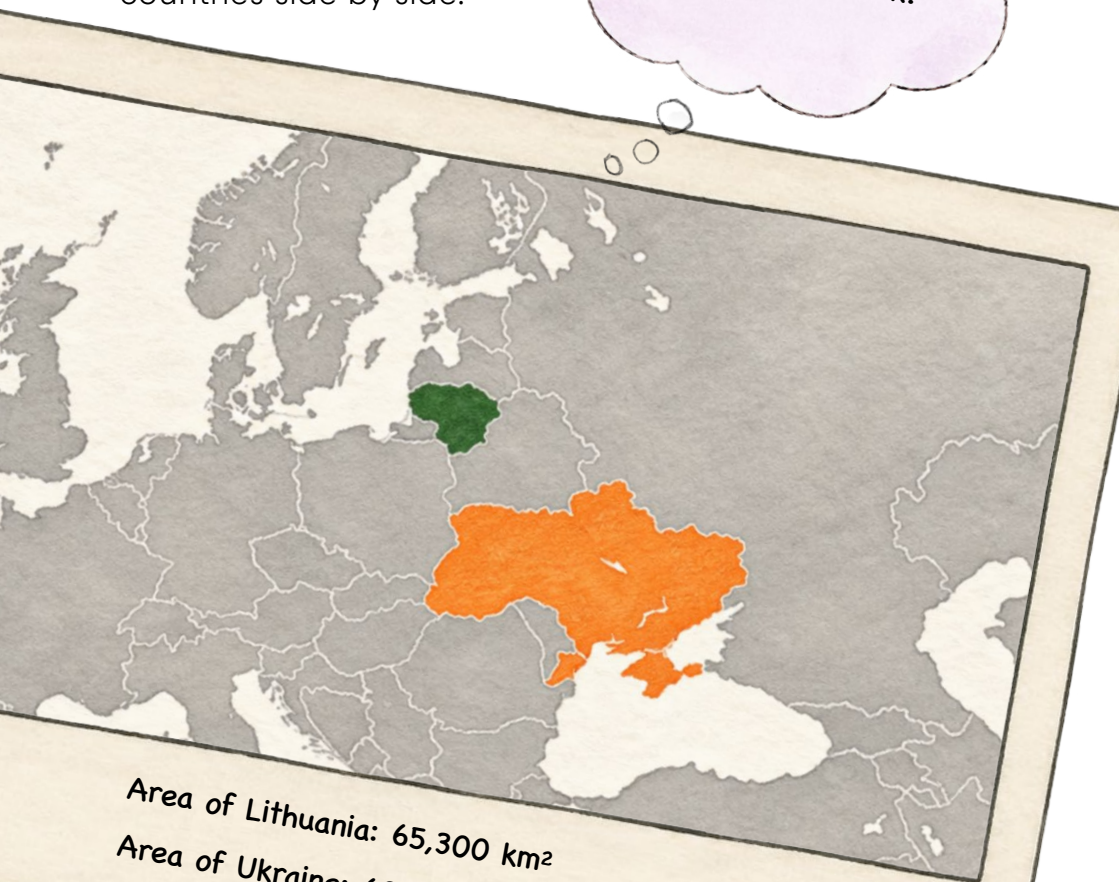
And the more I read, the more I realise that Ukraine and Lithuania are connected by much more than geography.

BEYOND THE MAP

The map makes one difference impossible to miss: Ukraine is almost ten times the size of Lithuania.

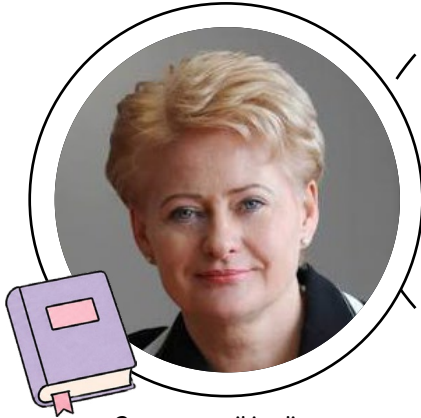
I stare at the two countries side by side.

It must be harder for a small country to make a difference in the world, I think.



Area of Lithuania: 65,300 km²
Area of Ukraine: 603,700 km²

A map can't answer that question. But I find something that can. Lithuania's former president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, once said:



Resources wikipedia.org



We should not think of ourselves as small. We are what we are, and we are as great as our ability to act in a great, respectable and dignified way. That is how others see us.

Dalia Grybauskaitė,
President of Lithuania,
2009-2019

A map can tell me how many square kilometres a country covers. But it can't show courage. Or how loudly a country is willing to speak when something is wrong. Or how much it is willing to do for others.

Lithuania is small on my screen.

But since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, its support has been anything but small.

I look at the map again. Lithuania does not seem so small anymore.



I freeze.

AND COUNTRIES DON'T MAKE CHOICES BY THEMSELVES. PEOPLE DO.



Matèja's words pop back into my head:



Elves live in
Lithuania...

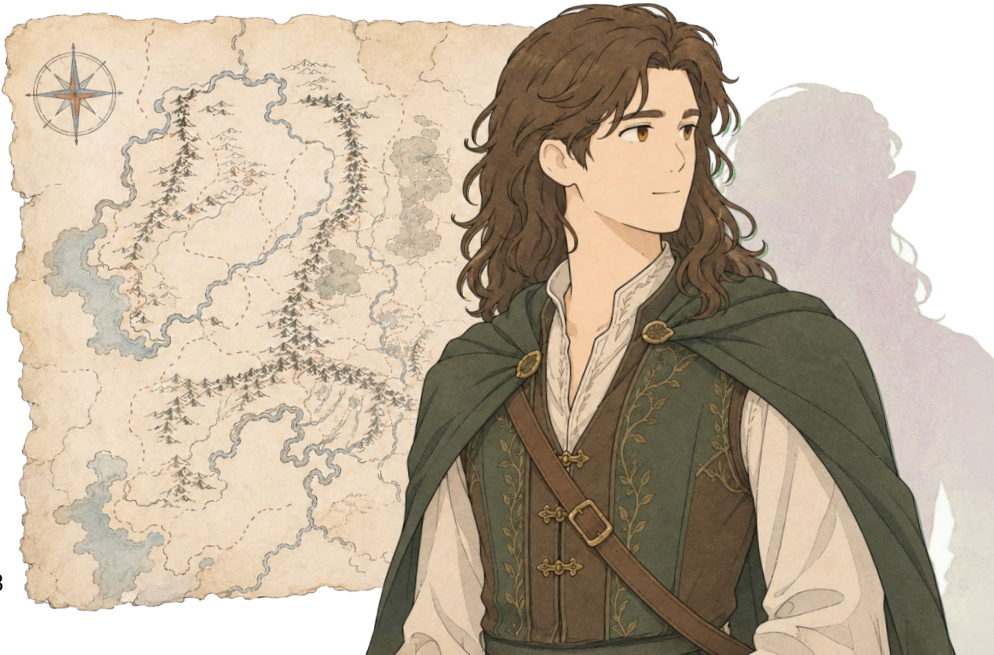
Wait.

Could the elves be some
of those people?



ELVES AREN'T JUST IN FAIRY TALES

My eyes drift back to the postcard. I run my finger over the elf's pointed ear. That's the kind of elf I know—tall, mysterious, straight out of Tolkien's stories of Middle-earth.





It takes me back to **Gedzio Park** of Legends in Yaremche. Hidden away in the Ukrainian Carpathians, it feels like a whole fairy-tale village, with hobbit houses, an elven cave, winding paths and even a hobbit pub.

When I visited, I felt as if I'd stepped straight into a fantasy world.

No wonder I'd always pictured "real elves" that way.

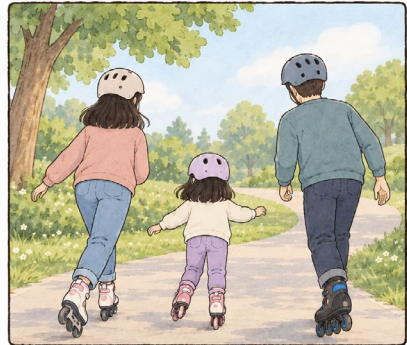
But after all my searching, I still haven't answered the biggest question. Castles, maps, the centre of Europe—I've learned a lot.

But Matėja's elves are still a mystery.



What kind of secret society do you have over there?

Then I find something I didn't expect. Lithuania's "elves" are people just like us. They study, work, meet friends for coffee, travel. You could probably pass one on the street and never know.



What makes them elves is what they do: they push back against lies and disinformation online and **help others find reliable information.**



And yes, there are women and girls among the elves too.

But why did people in
Lithuania start calling
themselves "elves" in the
first place?

And why did
this movement begin there?

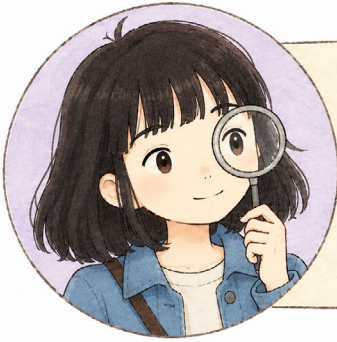
Time to dig a little
deeper.

I turn to a fresh page in
my notebook and write
in huge letters:

"WHO ARE THE
LITHUANIAN ELVES?"

The investigation is on.





HOW DID ELVES APPEAR IN LITHUANIA?

After Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity in 2014, Russia stepped up its information attacks against the Baltic states. False stories and **fake** accounts began spreading across social media. Some were pushed by so-called **internet trolls**—people who deliberately provoke, manipulate or mislead others online.

FAKE

Something false made to look real. A fake story, image or post may be created to trick people, cause panic or make them believe something that never happened.



TROLL

Someone who deliberately provokes or misleads people online. Trolls may spread false information, start arguments or try to make people angry or afraid. Their most powerful weapon is often not evidence, but emotion.



Now the elves are starting to make sense. They didn't appear because people loved fairy tales. They appeared because someone needed to push back against the lies.

But who decided to fight back first?

BOT FARM

A network of accounts used to push the same messages on a large scale. They can post, like, share and fill comment sections with the same message. Suddenly, it looks like hundreds of people are saying the same thing—even when only a few people are actually behind it.

Why does that matter? When we see the same message everywhere, we may start to think, "**Everyone believes this. Maybe it's true.**"

FAKE ACCOUNT

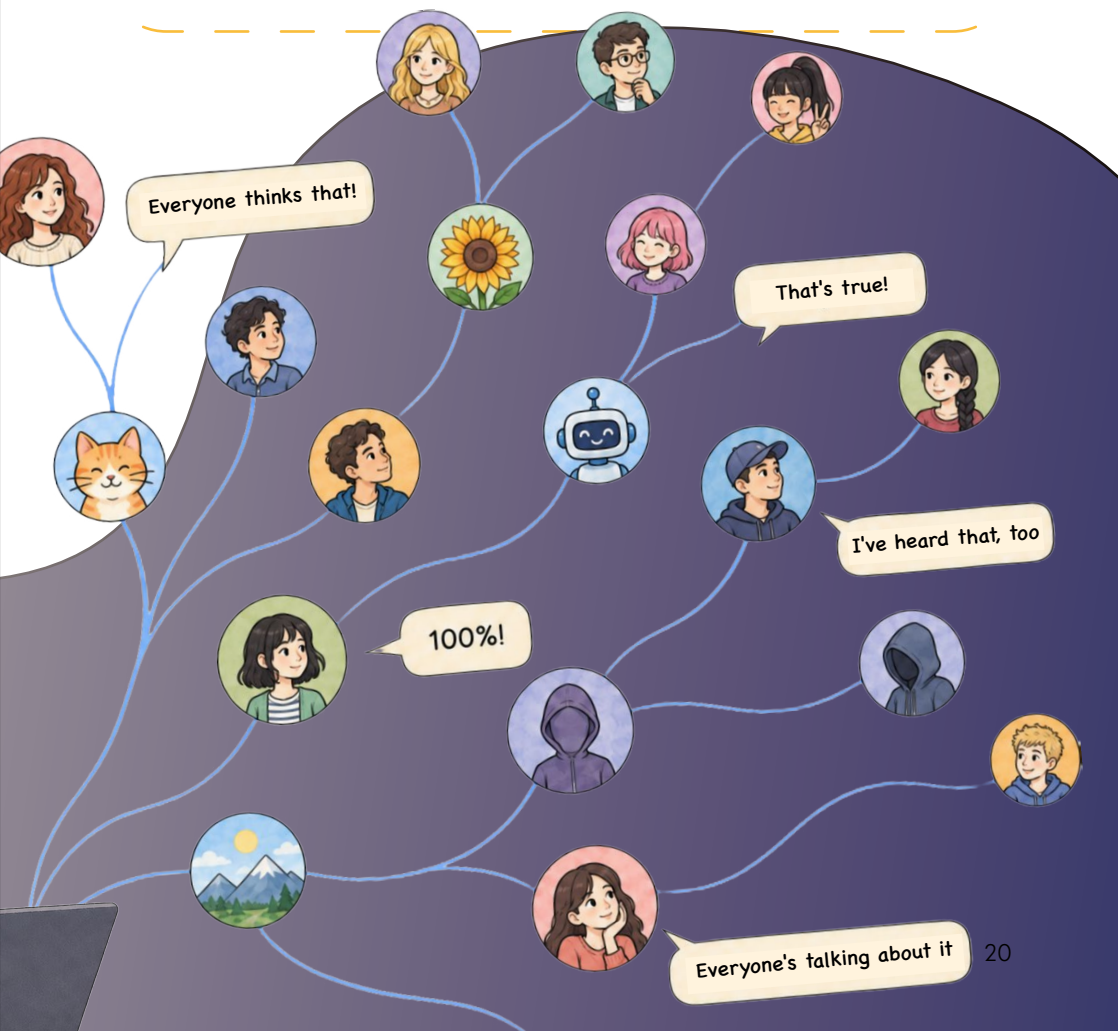
A profile with a made-up name and someone else's—or an AI-generated—photo, created by a person who is pretending to be someone they're not.

Look closer: Be careful with an unfamiliar account if it has very few friends, the photos look almost too perfect, or the account was created only recently. None of these signs proves that the account is fake, but they are good reasons to check it more carefully.



BOT

A bot isn't a real person. It's a computer program designed to act like one. It can have a fake photo, a name and even a made-up "personality". A bot can post angry or supportive comments, like posts and share content. But there isn't actually anyone sitting behind the account, thinking about what to say. The bot simply follows instructions: post, like, share—again and again, thousands of times a day.



WHO STARTED THE ELF COMMUNITY?

The story of Lithuania's "elves" sounds like a legend. Even the name of the person who first suggested starting the movement remains a mystery.

What we do know is that the "elves" came together on 22 July 2014.

At the time, more and more groups and accounts were appearing on social media, spreading the same false stories and russian **propaganda**.

It became clear that this was no coincidence. So a handful of people decided to join forces.

At first, they checked the claims and debunked them in the comments. Later, they formed a private online community to coordinate their next steps.



PROPAGANDA



Information used to influence what people think or do. It can mix facts with half-truths, misleading claims or complete lies.

I picture a few friends, sitting at their laptops, answering false claims one by one.

Did they know they were starting something that would grow far beyond their small group?



SO WHAT DO ELVES ACTUALLY DO?

They check facts. They look for reliable sources. They investigate suspicious stories and accounts. And when they find something false or misleading, they explain what's wrong with it.

Sometimes they report harmful content or fake accounts so the platform can take a closer look.



**NO BOWS. NO SWORDS. JUST
EVIDENCE, RELIABLE SOURCES —
AND SOMETIMES THE “REPORT”**



BUTTON.



WHY “ELVES”?

Internet trolls were already spreading false information, provoking arguments and trying to manipulate people online. So the people pushing back against them needed a name of their own. If there were trolls, why not elves?

MANIPULATION

A way of influencing someone without them noticing, so they believe what you want them to believe or do what you want them to do.



By now, I have
another question.
Do you need special skills
to become
an elf?

- ☐ Coding?
- ☐ Several languages?
- ☐ Some kind of secret ID?

APPARENTLY NOT.

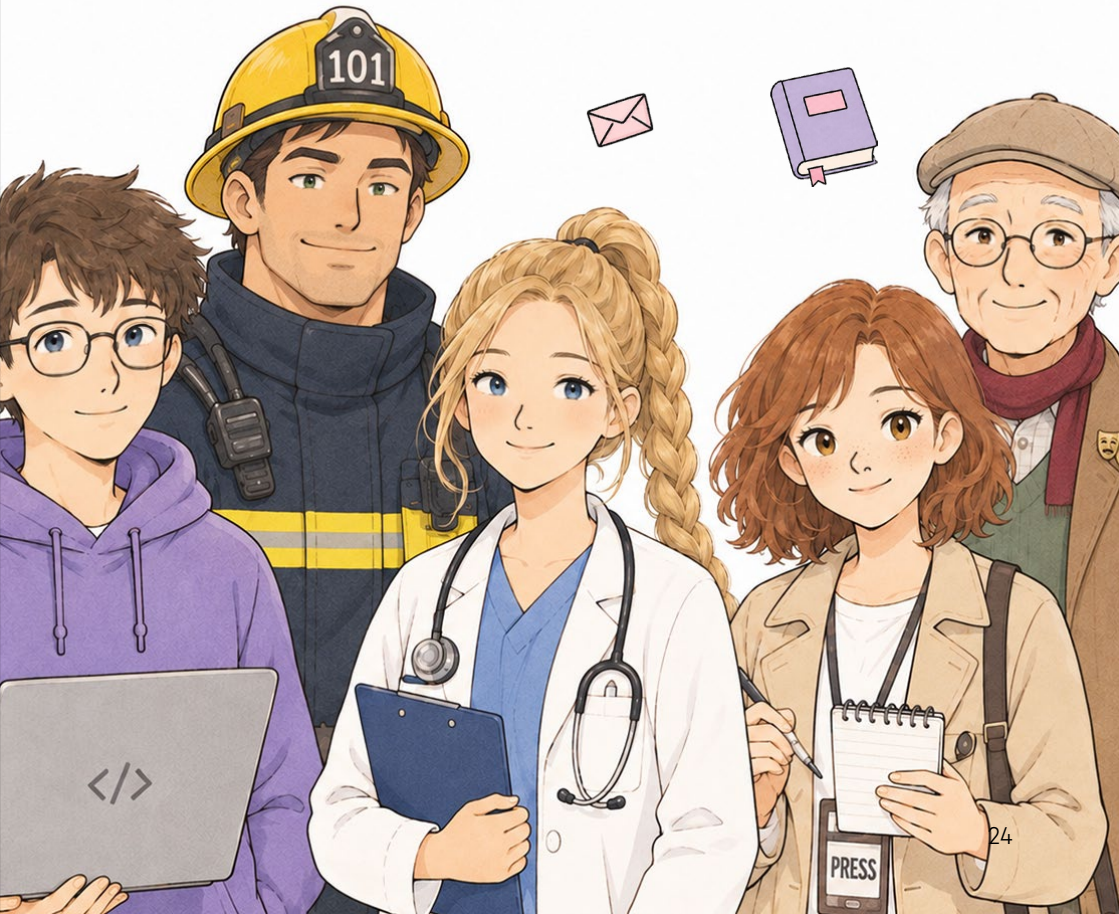
WHO CAN BECOME AN ELF?

Elves come from all kinds of backgrounds—teachers, programmers, doctors, students, business owners, journalists, retired people and many others.

It isn't your job or age that makes you an elf.

It's what you do with information: look for evidence, check before you trust a claim, and help stop false information from spreading.

That sounds almost too simple. But then another question pops into my head. If someone is spreading lies, can you lie back—as long as you're doing it for a good reason?





ONE RULE MATTERS MOST

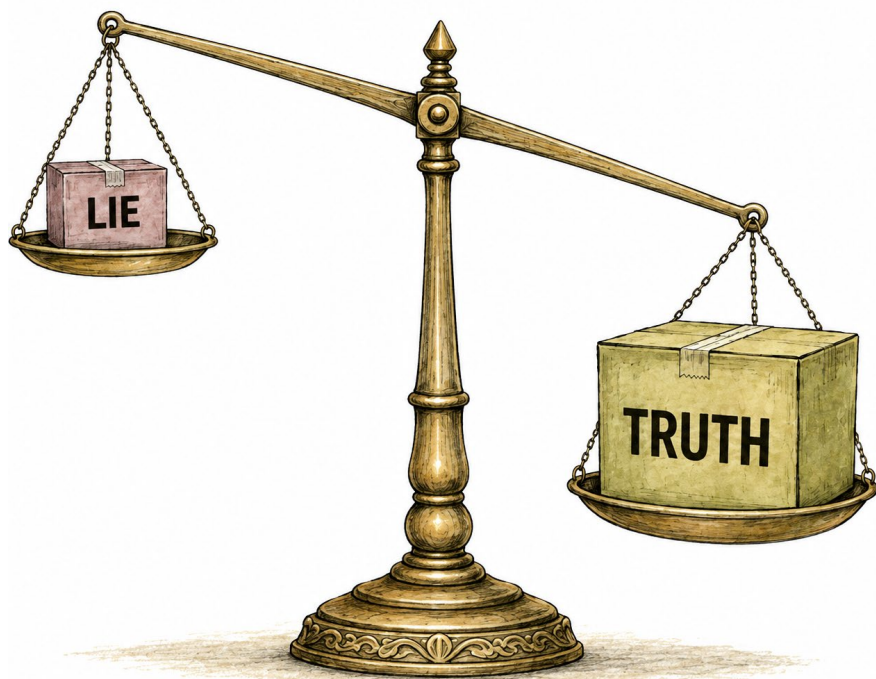
YOU CAN ONLY FIGHT LIES WITH THE TRUTH



No rumours. No made-up stories. No lies in return.

Just facts you can check. I underline that twice.

Using a lie against another lie doesn't suddenly make it true.



WHY DOES ANY OF THIS MATTER?

Lithuania knows that a country can come under attack long before anyone reaches for a weapon. Lies and propaganda can spread fear, turn people against each other and make them stop trusting the people and institutions around them.

THAT'S WHY FIGHTING DISINFORMATION CAN BE PART OF PROTECTING A COUNTRY TOO.

And then I find my favourite detail. The first elves needed a private place to coordinate their work.

SO THEY CREATED A FACEBOOK GROUP DISGUISED AS A COMMUNITY FOR YORKSHIRE TERRIER LOVERS.



WHAT THE COUNTRIES SHARE

TOGETHER THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Why do people in Lithuania understand the danger of lies so well?

The answer takes me much further back than social media.

Messages from my friends keep popping up on my phone, but they can wait. Before I tell them about the elves, I want to understand the history behind them.





Ukraine and Lithuania share more than seven centuries of history. At different times, our peoples lived within the same state. Both countries also fought for their freedom, lived through occupation and regained their independence.

I had no idea Ukraine and Lithuania had so much history in common.

I open a timeline and start scrolling back through the centuries.

Ukraine and Lithuania: More Than Seven Centuries Side by Side

1

13th century

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania
takes shape

A new state appears on the
map.

Over the next centuries, it
grows into one of the largest
states in Europe.



2

14th century

Ukrainian lands join
the Grand Duchy

The Grand Duchy
gradually expands into
Volhynia, the Kyiv region,
Podillia, the Chernihiv
region and other
Ukrainian lands.



4

1569

The Union of Lublin

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and
the Kingdom of Poland form the
Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
Most Ukrainian lands come under
the Polish Crown. From this point on,
the paths of Ukraine and Lithuania
begin to diverge — but the ties
between their peoples remain.

5

1795

The Russian Empire
takes control

After the final partition of the
Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,
the Russian Empire controls most
Lithuanian lands and a large part
of Ukrainian lands. Both peoples
spend long periods under Russian
imperial rule.



6

The

It pro
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Lithuan
prin

8

1990

Lithuania restores
its independence

On 11 March, Lithuania
becomes the first
Soviet republic
to declare the
restoration of its
independence.



9

1991

Ukraine declares
independence

On 24 August, Ukraine's
Parliament, the Verkhovna
Rada, adopts the Act of
Declaration of Independence
of Ukraine. Lithuania is among
the first countries to officially
recognise independent
Ukraine.

3

1529, 1566
and 1588**The Lithuanian Statutes**

Lithuanian rulers generally keep local laws, languages, religions and customs. A phrase often used to describe their approach was: "We do not disturb what is old, nor do we introduce what is new."



The Grand Duchy adopts three major collections of laws. The Statutes remain in use in Ukrainian lands for more than two hundred years and rank among the most important legal codes of their time in this part of Europe.



The Lithuanian Statutes were written in Ruthenian, the language the Grand Duchy used for much of its state administration. Ruthenian belongs to the linguistic history of both modern Ukrainian and Belarusian.



1918

Act of Independence of Lithuania

declained independence Russia and the restoration of an independent State of Lithuania, governed by democratic principles, with Vilnius as its capital.

7

1940

The Soviet Union occupies Lithuania

The Soviet Union occupies Lithuania. Ukraine has already been part of the Soviet Union for almost two decades.

10

2004 and
2013–2014**Lithuania supports Ukraine's democratic choice**

Lithuania stands with Ukrainians during the Orange Revolution and again during the Revolution of Dignity.

11

Since 2014

Standing together against Russian aggression

After Russia attacks Ukraine in 2014, Lithuania becomes one of Ukraine's strongest supporters. It helps Ukraine, supports its defenders and calls on other countries to act too. Around the same time, Lithuania's elf movement becomes especially active. What starts as a small group of people fighting lies and propaganda online eventually spreads far beyond Lithuania.



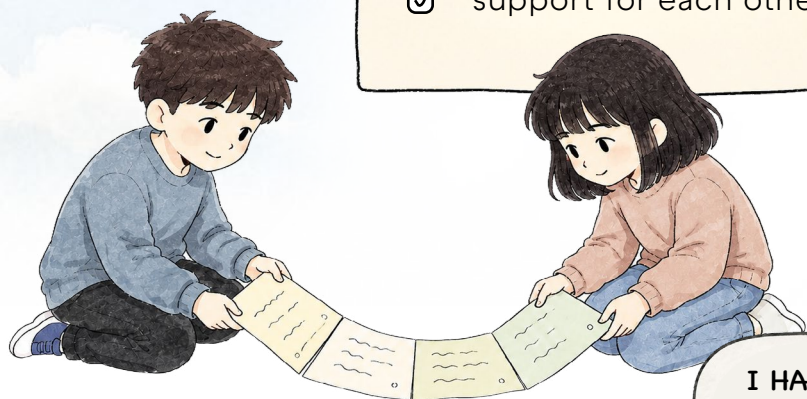


Allies Today



Ukraine and Lithuania share the same values:

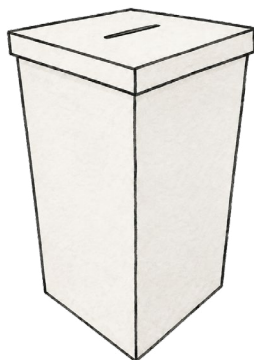
- ✓ freedom;
- ✓ democracy;
- ✓ respect for human rights;
- ✓ support for each other.



I HAVE THE
RIGHT TO VOTE

I look back at the timeline. Seven centuries of history—and I'd only known a tiny part of it.

Ukraine and Lithuania may not share a border, but their histories have crossed again and again: through the same state and laws, struggles for independence, and a long experience of Russian imperial and Soviet rule.



CONNECTIONS Today

That shared history helps explain Lithuania's support for Ukraine today.

When Russia launches its full-scale invasion in 2022, Lithuania's support grows even stronger. Lithuania provides Ukraine with military assistance, food, medicine and financial support.



It also urges other countries to help and consistently supports Ukraine's membership in the European Union and NATO.

And the cooperation doesn't stop with the help Ukraine needs today.

Lithuania and Ukraine are also working together on new technologies for the future.

One example is the Brave Lithuania programme, which supports new security technologies, including Ukrainian inventions and innovations.



COUNTRIES, ONE CLICK AWAY

Countries can share more than history and culture. They can share technology, ideas and experience too.

Lithuania has been developing digital public services for many years.

Wait. We have this in Ukraine too!

Diia.



In Ukraine, people can use the Diia app to keep digital documents on their phones, access government services, register a business, pay taxes, report damaged property and use some e-democracy tools—all from a smartphone.



E-democracy in Diia—and in action!

ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY

Using digital technology to give people more ways to have a say in decisions in their country or local community—for example, by voting, signing petitions or contacting public authorities online.

When Ukraine began building its own digital state, it drew on the experience of Lithuanian specialists, among others.

DIGITALISATION

Using digital technology to make everyday tasks and services simpler and easier to access. For example, a paper document can become a digital one, or a government service can be accessed online instead of in person.

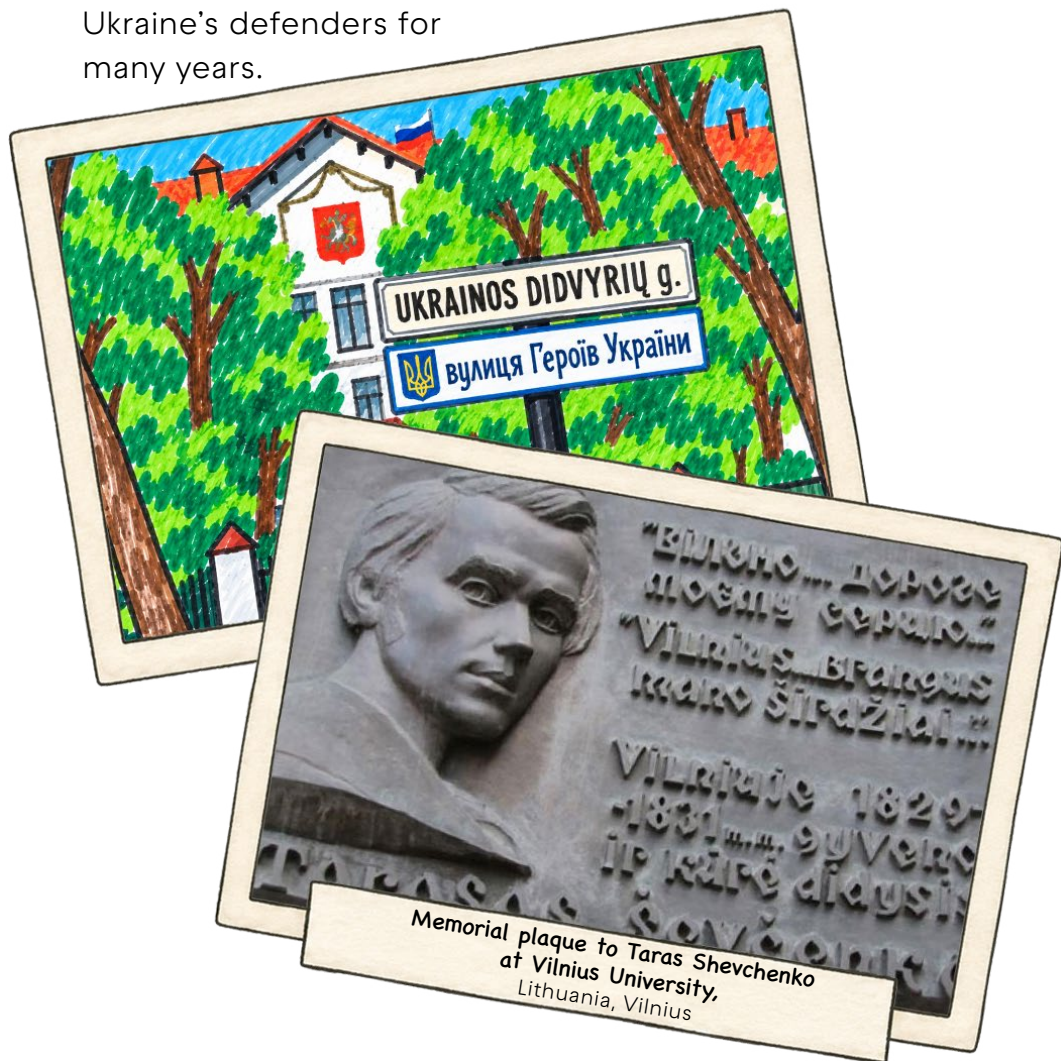


I used to think "digitalisation" sounded complicated—and a little boring. But it's actually much simpler than it sounds. It isn't only about apps and digital documents. It's really about people: making public services easier and faster to access and creating more opportunities to take part in decisions that affect everyday life.

Turns out, democracy can start with a single click too.

But the friendship between the two countries goes far beyond international agreements and political statements.

Walk through Vilnius and you can visit places connected with the life and work of Ukraine's most famous poet Taras Shevchenko, or stroll along Ukrainian Heroes Street. You can also learn about the volunteers of Lithuania's **Blue/Yellow** organisation, which has been raising money for Ukraine's defenders for many years.



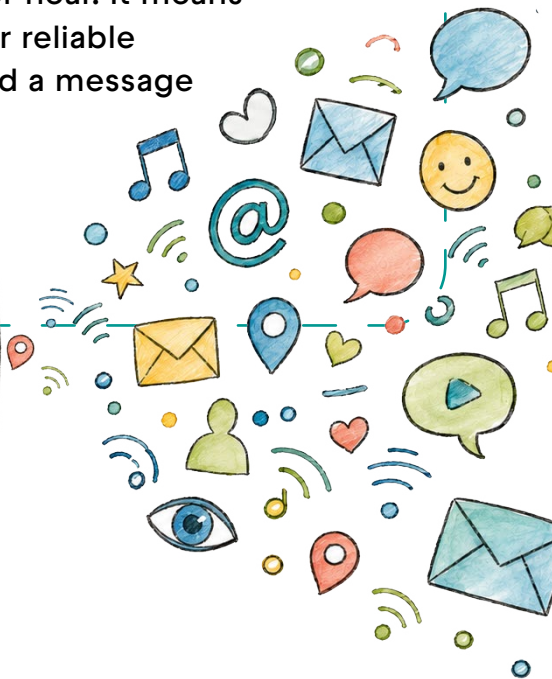


The more I read
about Vilnius, the
more traces of
Ukraine I find.



MEDIA LITERACY

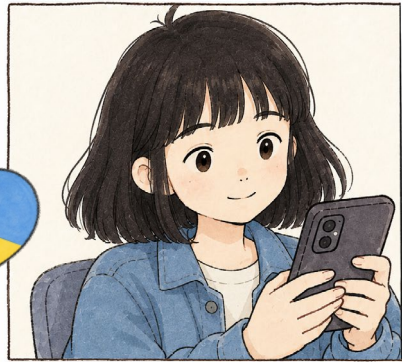
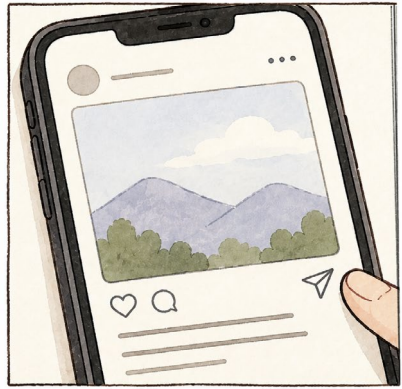
Knowing how to think carefully about the information you see, read or hear. It means checking claims, looking for reliable sources, asking who created a message and why, and pausing before you share something you haven't checked.



I look at the Share button at the bottom of the post on my phone. Pressing it would take one second.

Stopping to check the facts before deciding whether the story deserves to be shared is harder.

That small pause suddenly makes the elves' mission feel much closer to my own life.



Of course we do. We just don't call them elves.

They are independent journalists, volunteers, civil society activists, cybersecurity specialists, educators and many others. They check information, expose fakes, explain complicated issues in clear language and help stop false information from spreading.

Did you know that fact-checking is a real job?

FACT-CHECKER

A person who checks whether information in news stories, posts, photographs and videos is accurate. Fact-checkers trace information back to original sources and compare it with the evidence. Basically, they're detectives in the world of information.

I think of Matèja and her dad. No wonder she is so proud of him.

MARTA'S NOTEBOOK

I used to think... Once a country won its independence, it kept it forever.

Now I know... Freedom has to be protected every day.

That's why... Lithuania has its elves. Ukraine has people who fight lies and disinformation too.

My conclusion: Freedom isn't only a right. Protecting it is a responsibility we all share.

ANYONE CAN BE A REAL ELF!

I draw a box around that last sentence. I can be an elf too.

I read Matêja's postcard again.

This time, I know exactly what she means by elves. At first, I was looking for pointed ears and fairy-tale creatures. Instead, I've found real people fighting lies and protecting freedom and democracy.

I smile and pull out a postcard of Gedzio Park of Legends in Yaremche. I once went there looking for fairy-tale elves. Now it seems like the perfect card to send to a country with real ones.

I pick up my pen. Time to write back.



Hi, Matèja!

Thanks for your postcard!

I'll admit it: at first, I thought you were joking. To me, elves belonged in Tolkien's books, fairy tales and Gedzio Park of Legends in Yaremche. That's where the postcard I'm sending you comes from.

But now I know real elves can be much closer than we think.

I used to think information warfare was something for journalists, soldiers or politicians to deal with.

Now I know we all make choices about information every day.

Believe a story without checking it—or find the original source.

Spread a rumour—or stop it.

Stay silent—or speak up.

We all choose what we do with information.

I think I've made my choice.

And now I really want to visit Vilnius. We can investigate the mystery of Europe's geographical centre, wander through the Old Town, try real cepelinai... and start our own Young Elves Club.

We'll have just one rule: check before you believe.

Deal?



Best wishes from Ukraine,
Marta

The story of Ukraine and Lithuania shows that

**FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND TRUTH NEED
PEOPLE  TO PROTECT THEM—NOT ONCE,
BUT EVERY DAY.**

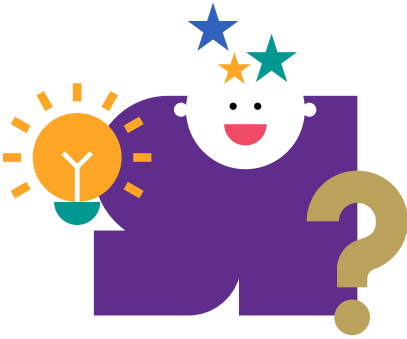
Some do it on the battlefield. Others do it in a newsroom, a school, a laboratory, a volunteer centre or even at home. Sometimes, protecting the truth can be as simple as stopping before you share a suspicious post—and checking it first.

You don't need to be from Lithuania. You don't need pointed ears or magic.

Anyone can be a real elf.

You just need **to look closer.**





THINK LIKE AN ELF



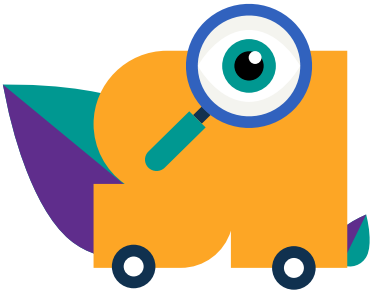
How can false information cause harm in real life?



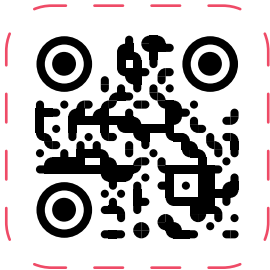
What might make you stop and think before trusting a post, video or news story?



You see a post you want to share, but you're not sure it's true. What could you check first?



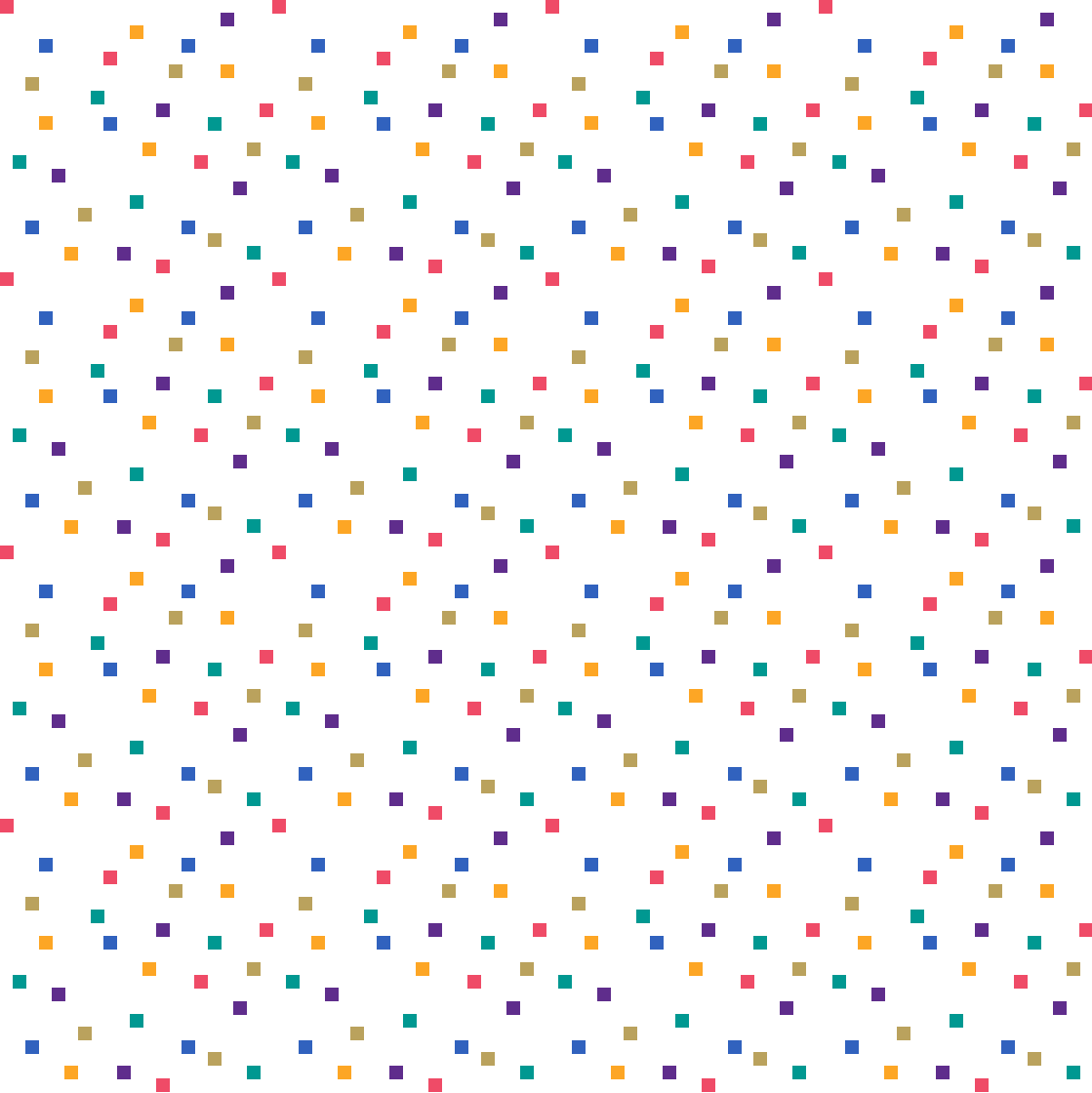
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TO LEARN MORE?



Blue/Yellow



The language of the
Lithuanian Statutes



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