

TWIN4DEM press release:



### **Erasmus University Receives €3 Million Horizon Europe Grant to Study Democratic Resilience Using Digital Twins**

**Rotterdam, October 2024** – In a new transdisciplinary project funded by a €3 million Horizon Europe grant, Erasmus University’s School of Social and Behavioural Sciences researchers Dr. Clara Egger and Dr. Asya Zhelyazkova will lead a groundbreaking effort to explore how democracies decline and how computational research tools can help strengthen democratic resilience. The project, titled **TWIN4DEM: Strengthening Democratic Resilience Through Digital Twins**, brings together 11 partners across Europe.

Over the past decade, many democratic systems have faced increasing threats from within, as governments gradually consolidate power—a process known as "executive aggrandisement." This trend has raised widespread concern among experts, policymakers, and citizens about the long-term stability of democracy in Europe. Despite the abundance of data on democracy, researchers have struggled to pinpoint the complex, multidimensional causes behind this phenomenon. Traditional research methods have proven insufficient in fully understanding how democracies erode over time.



*Protesters in Budapest, Hungary, 2006 © Butajj.*

TWIN4DEM aims to change this by leveraging cutting-edge **Computational Social Science (CSS)** techniques, such as **natural language processing, data aggregation, and dynamic simulation models**, to analyse democratic decline. The project will prototype the first-ever **digital twins** of four European political systems: Czechia, France, Hungary, and the Netherlands. These digital twins will simulate real-world scenarios, helping researchers and stakeholders better understand the factors driving democratic erosion and the impact of policy decisions.

**Dr. Clara Egger** explained: “By combining expertise from political science, computational social sciences, ethics, linguistics, and computer science, we are creating tools that not only advance our academic understanding to democratic resilience but also ensure that these insights benefit society as a whole.”

**Dr. Asya Zhelyazkova** added: “The threats facing democracies today are less about dramatic coups and more about the slow erosion of institutional checks and balances. TWIN4DEM will use innovative methods to reveal how these dynamics unfold over time, providing vital insights into how we can protect and strengthen democratic institutions.”

The project, set to begin on **January 1, 2025**, will run for three years and involves partners from across Europe, including **Université Catholique de Lille (France), GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (Germany), Fondazione Bruno Kessler (Italy), Linnaeus University (Sweden), Babeş-Bolyai University (Romania), Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont (Hungary), Charles University (Czechia), Eticas Research and Consulting (Spain), Democracy International (Germany), and Diadikasia Business Consulting (Greece)**. These institutions will collaborate to develop advanced tools for processing and analysing both textual and non-textual data in a more inclusive, participatory research environment.

For more information about the project, visit <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101178061>.