Motivation Statement

The proposed PhD project is motivated by both my academic interest in the digital humanities as well as the broader societal promotion of equality, democracy, and prosperity, as pillars of the European Project. Growing up in a European school environment in Brussels instilled in me a strong belief in Europe's democratic dimensions. Shaped by these beliefs, I knew from a young age that I wanted to work in the EU context and engage in work with a meaningful societal impact. My first opportunity came as an assistant project manager, as part of the EU-funded Research & Innovation project *ReNEW*, helping to coordinate research across 11 countries and 24 partners. My further contributions to EU-funded projects *PIONEERS, PLATINA4Action,* and *DT4GS* showed me how research was developed into real-world applications, as I attended conferences, workshops, and partner meetings.

Working across diverse EU projects also revealed to me a crucial gap: the need to combine more computational methods with cultural studies to ensure a systematic yet critical analysis of society. I found that traditional cultural studies offer rich observations about today's complex digital world, but can sometimes struggle to demonstrate this analysis in a form which policymakers can integrate. In contrast, new computational approaches allow for an analysis of digital culture which is scalable and can discover trends. This strong interest in bridging computational methods with cultural studies led me to the *Cultural Data and AI* Master's at the University of Amsterdam. There, I fell in love with programming. My dedication to programming was reflected in a grade of 9.2 out of 10 for the Python methods course.

During my studies, I combined my newfound programming skills with my passion for EU project work, contributing to the R&I EU project *DE-CONSPIRATOR* as a Master's project and my thesis. For this project, I analysed Russian and Chinese disinformation in European countries, and focused my thesis on French-speaking countries in Europe. *DE-CONSPIRATOR* enabled me to apply my digital methods skills, utilising Natural Language Processing (NLP), social network analysis, and cross-platform hyperlink data analysis to deliver research with both academic and policy relevance. This project also taught me the value of teamwork and working alongside experts such as Dr Bharath Ganesh, who not only helped me develop my research skills but also showed me the value of working across disciplines and learning from others.

To continue my research on disinformation, I applied for a research stay as part of the

IMEC-SMIT research group at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Under Dr Ike Picone, who has been working on disinformation and toxic news from a user perspective, I theoretically explored conceptual and methodological limitations to our current understanding of Russian disinformation. The research stay allowed me to turn my Master's Thesis into a publication, and gave me the opportunity to provide a guest lecture for the Digital Methods course on AI. From this position, I also contributed to a HUMAN and VPRO project headed by Emillie van de Keulenaar, which detected Russian disinformation narratives in real-time during the campaign preceding the Dutch elections in October 2025.

My past experiences have shaped my viewpoint that the EU faces an urgent need for research that combines rigorous computational methods with deep cultural and political understanding. Through my expertise in the digital humanities, I am convinced that I can contribute to research that not only advances academic knowledge but also addresses practical challenges in tackling Russian disinformation. As disinformation studies are still in need of more interdisciplinary integration, I believe my profile, in combination with my proposal, offers a distinctive opportunity by uniting data science with cultural and political analysis that allows for a significant contribution to the field of disinformation studies.