New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Cooperation in Europe (NORFACE)

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AHEAD OF THE 2024 EP ELECTIONS:

LESSONS FROM THE NORFACE GOVERNANCE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

TABLE OF
CONTENT

WELCOME
MESSAGE

Sophie Lecheler
Scientific Programme Coordinator

Thank you for attending our workshop!

The elections to the European Parliament in 2024 come at a time when democratic politics and governance across Europe are in crisis. Before citizens get to vote, political parties across Europe and EU institutions must consider how the election will be impacted by a myriad of challenges such as polarization, disinformation, decreasing trust in institutions, and dwindling political participation.

The 14 international research projects funded through the NORFACE GOVERNANCE programme offer unique academic insights on exactly these challenges. Their project focus is outlined in this booklet, aimed at providing policy-makers and other interested observers of democratic politics the opportunity to directly interact with leading scholars on the topic they are working on. The key findings of the GOVERNANCE research projects, also included in this booklet, can help to understand how challenges to democracies across Europe have been met and with what success, and what new solutions to these challenges are needed. We hope this workshop is only the start of an intensive and important conversation between researchers and policy-makers on the future of European democratic governance!
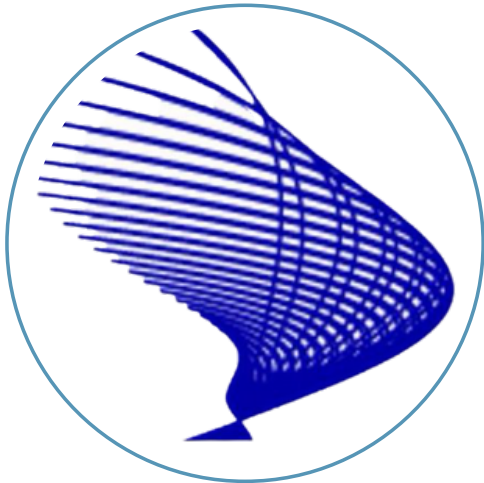
Thursday, June 8		
08.00 – 09.00	Registration	
09.00 – 09.30	Welcome and Opening remarks **Preparing for the 2024 EP Elections in Turbulent Times** Sophie Lecheler, University of Vienna (Governance Programme Coordination) Nikoleta Yordanova, Leiden University (Lead PI, EUINACTION)	
09.30 – 11.00	Session 1 **Tackling Disinformation and Bias: Insights on Media Influence and Media Independence** Kate Dommett, University of Sheffield: *impulse talk* Patrick van Erkel, University of Amsterdam: *impulse talk* Luca Bertuzzi, Euractiv Paolo Cesarini, European Media and Information Fund (EMIF) & TENEO Soren Liborius, European Union External Action Service *Moderator*: Sophie Lecheler, University of Vienna	**Main Discussion Points:** 1. Digital Media in Europe: How have digital media landscapes changed, and how is this change relevant for the EP elections? 2. Prevalence of Disinformation: What do we really know about the presence of disinformation in election campaigns such as the EP elections? Identifying Culprits: Who is responsible for the spread and creation of disinformation in Europe? What role does traditional mass media play here? 3. Building Resilience: How can EU institutions, media, and citizens fight disinformation?
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee Break	
11.30 – 13.00	Session 2 **Participation and Representation of Citizens and Political Actors** Anastasia Ershova, Leiden University: *impulse talk* Christel Koop, King's College London: *impulse talk* David Mair, Joint Research Centre, European Commission's Science and Knowledge Service: *impulse talk* Joachim Wilcke, Head of Office & Advisor for Constitutional Affairs Silvia Kotanidis, European Parliamentary Research Service *Moderator*: Nikoleta Yordanova, Leiden University	**Main Discussion Points:** 1. Participation as a driver of representation: How does participation translate into representation (in the EU)? How could visibility and participation in the upcoming EP elections be increased? 2. Conflict of interests: Why does the EU fail to earn the reputation of a representative political system among the citizens? Whose preferences prevail in shaping policies when the majority interests of citizens and organized groups do not align? What are the consequences of that for democratic representation? 3. Channels of participation and representation: Do all citizens' views across all member states have the same impact on EU decision-making and policies? Which institutions are better able to channel citizen preferences, and why?

	Thursday, June 8
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch Break
14.00 – 15.30	Session 3 **Great Divides?: Elections in Times of Fragmentation and Polarization** Stephane Baele, University of Exeter: *impulse talk* Christine Sylvester, Strathclyde University: *impulse talk* Gerhard Schnyder, Loughborough University: *impulse talk* Denise Hruby, Freelance Journalist *Moderator*: Zachary Greene, University of Strathclyde	**Main Discussion Points:** 1. Impact of domestic fragmentation: How does domestic fragmentation over policy decisions affect EU governance of these same policy fields? 2. Intra-Party division: What effect does inter and intra-party polarization have on electoral dynamics and outcomes in these divided times? 3. Rise of misinformation: What effect does political misinformation have on fragmentation and polarization of parties' electoral viability? In the context of the upcoming 2024 European Elections, how might misinformation influence the electoral outcomes?
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee Break
16.00 – 17.30	Session 4 **The Changing Authority and Responsiveness of Institutions in Democracies** Karen M. Anderson - University College Dublin: *impulse talk* Christina Eckes, University of Amsterdam: *impulse talk* Amy Verdun, University of Victoria: *impulse talk* Johannes Greubel, European Policy Center Samira Rafaela, MEP, Renew Europe Group *Moderator*: Christel Koop, King's College London	**Main Discussion Points:** 1. Authority of institutions: When do politicians delegate new policy competencies and authority to institutions? How do the ongoing crises shape the ability of institutions to obtain new competencies? 2. Responsiveness of institutions: What constraints institutional policy action when public preferences and organized interests demand it, especially in times of crisis? 3. Technocratic vs. representative institutions: Why and when do technocratic institutions seek to appear responsive to the citizens and strengthen their public legitimacy? How have the recent turbulent times shaped the strategies of the institutions to do so?
17.30 – 18.00	Closing remarks Sophie Lecheler Nikoleta Yordanova
18:30	Dinner

INTRODUCTION
ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Democratic politics and governance in Europe are facing turbulent times. Party systems have crumbled or been substantially changed and so have citizen attachments to government, political parties and democratic procedures. This sixth NORFACE (New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Cooperation in Europe) transnational programme on Democratic governance in a turbulent age offers a timely investigation of the precise nature of this recent turbulence, on how European states can negotiate it and develop strategies to enhance the quality of democratic politics and governance.

The programme is structured around five of the most important challenges to democratic governance and politics:

• Theme 1: Inequality and redistribution

• Theme 2: The evolving politics of threat

• Theme 3: Democratisation of information and expertise

• Theme 4: Shifting identities and representation

• Theme 5: Changing authority of institutions

INTRODUCTION
ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Purpose

This programme has three major objectives:

1. To develop innovative and excellent research proposals addressing important challenges to democratic governance and politics;
2. To produce added value through the development of European cross-national research collaborations exploring the impacts of variations in social, economic, cultural, and political contexts on changes in how democracies work;
3. To identify promising forms of policy innovation and institutional design and explore the conditions for their application in different jurisdictions.

Impact

The research projects will provide a new assessment of how the major challenges to democratic politics and governance have had an impact on social and political relationships in different countries, what accounts for the variation, how these challenges have been met, and with what success.

The academic impact of the research will be the generation of new knowledge, insights, and theoretical perspectives on relations between the state, political, social, and economic institutions, and citizens, as well as on relations among different groups of citizens. The practical and policy impacts of the programme arise from the examination of the key variables and influence that shape the intensity and outcomes of these challenges, thus providing the basis for understanding the range of positive interventions and policies that might lead to greater democratic innovation.

RESEARCH
PROJECTS

Fourteen transnational and multi-disciplinary social science research consortia have received funding from the European NORFACE network. They focus on subjects such as disruptive changes in the political landscape, polarisation and populism, (European) identities, and the legitimacy of the administrative state. In the following, you will find a brief introduction to the projects as well as the first key findings.

NAVIGATING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH EUROPEAN LANDSCAPES OF CRIMINALISATION

About

The CrimScapes project explores the expanding application of criminal law, crime control measures, and imaginaries of (il)legality as responses to, and producers of, a growing politics of threat across the European region. Given the inherent tensions between democratic processes and ever-expanding legal regulations, the project investigates this reliance on criminalization as a challenge to the participatory nature of democratic societies and as possible symptoms and causes of the general sense of turbulence dominating much of economic, social, and political life today. It analyses the motivations behind and implications of criminalization for the varied actors affected by and (re)producing landscapes of criminalization (i.e., crimscapes).

crimscapes.de
Lead PI: beate.binder@hu-berlin.de

Key Findings

- Brings to the fore a mostly overlooked, yet growing and driving policy trend across the world, and in Europe: the **politics of criminalisation**.
- Investigates if and in what ways "**a punitive turn**", a policy trend which has widely been described with regards to the anglo-saxon world, plays out and becomes enacted and contested locally across "landscapes of criminalisation" in Europe.
- Analyzes **criminalisation** as both, the mobilization of citizen rights on the one hand and a challenge to participatory and transparent democratic processes on the other hand.
- Brings together ethnographic work on several of the currently **most contested and criminalised fields**: search and rescue activities in the Mediterranean Sea, abortion, drug use and sex work in Poland, Hate Speech online, women's prisons in Germany and HIV/AIDS in Finland.

DATA-DRIVEN CAMPAIGNS: INTENDED AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES FOR DEMOCRACY

norfacedatadriven.com
Lead PI: sanne.kruikemeier@wur.nl

About

The project DATADRIVEN studies if data-driven campaigns using online micro-targeting techniques threaten democracy. The consortium will focus on the intended and unintended consequences of data-driven targeting and digital persuasion. In light of ongoing political and societal turmoil, investigating how citizens may be persuaded in a turbulent age and a changing media landscape has never been more important. The studies will focus on a micro (consequences for citizens), meso (consequences for political elites), and macro-level effects (consequences for democracy).

Key Findings

- Data-driven campaign practices seen to threaten democracy are often **not manifest** in party campaigns. Instead, we see a set of practices that build on pre-existing techniques, and which are far less sophisticated than is often assumed.
- Regulatory control of data-driven campaigns is typically **spread across multiple agencies**, making coordination difficult. Currently data protection is the most common focus of national regulators, however, new EU rules on voter targeting and profiling will expand this remit.
- People are – in general – **more negative** towards data-driven campaigning, but when asked in more detail, people tend to be more nuanced.
- If done successfully, data-driven campaigning usually leads to "**favorable**" outcomes (can influence voting behavior), or we find **null effects.**
- It is **not easy** to increase people's competence toward data-driven campaigning.

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE OF FUNDED PENSION SCHEMES

deepen-norface.eu
Lead PI: karen.anderson@ucd.ie

About

DEEPEN explores the democratic governance of capital-funded occupational pension schemes. They investigate how governments, regulators, and labor market actors govern funded pensions (input legitimacy) and whether participants are satisfied with pension fund performance (output legitimacy). The project focuses on Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Ireland, and Spain because the structure of funded pension provision varies along key dimensions relevant to input and output legitimacy. The project combines quantitative analysis of survey data with comparative case studies based on elite and expert interviews and primary and secondary documents analysis.

Key Findings

- There is **wide variation** in the extent to which participants in funded pension schemes can influence decisions about how pension assets are invested. These differences result from variations in how governments & labour market actors organise funded occupational pensions.
- Survey results from NL, DK, IE, SP, DE, and AT show that both citizens at large and participants in these funds are more concerned about the **financial performance** of their funded pension schemes than with how decisions about investments are made.
- Participants who have **obtained information** over the performance or characteristics of their pension plan and have been actively involved in collective decision-making are significantly more satisfied with decision-making and financial performance.
- In European countries, participation in private pension plans is shaped by **socio-demographic factors**. Individuals with higher income and upper-status occupations are more likey to participate in private pension plans.

WILLINGNESS AND CAPACITY FOR EU POLICY ACTION IN TIMES OF CRISES: CONFLICTS, POSITIONS AND OUTCOMES

euinaction.eu
Lead PI: n.yordanova@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

About

Global financial, migration, security, and pandemic crises demand coordination between national governments, which the European Union (EU) historically facilitates. Yet, the surge of Eurosceptic, nationalist and populist political parties and movements across Europe hinder discussions about EU cooperation on various issues. This raises the question of how these competing pressures affect EU policy integration. The project aims to inform responsive and effective policy reforms with findings of the willingness and capacity for European integration in specific policy areas.

Key Findings

- We offer new theoretical and empirical insights on the willingness and capacity of the EU institutions to **respond** to public preferences on the scope and level of the EU authority based on the analysis of legislative documents and indicators for public opinion across member states.
- Advance knowledge about the **political rhetoric** of domestic elites on the EU authority using large-scale parliamentary speech data.
- Inform recommendations for policy and institutional innovations in the EU that can increase **policy responsiveness and efficiency.**
- Contribute to building citizens' trust in the EU institutions by informing them about EU policy responsiveness and identifying conditions to strengthen it.

EXTREME IDENTITIES: A LINGUISTIC AND VISUAL ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN FAR-RIGHT ONLINE COMMUNITIES' POLITICS OF IDENTITY

socialanalytics.ex.ac.uk/exid
Lead PI: s.baele@exeter.ac.uk

About

The ExId project offers an analysis of the European far-right online landscape, combining computational methods with in-depth qualitative analysis; it will provide dynamic analysis of both the evolution of the European far-right online landscape and its linguistic and visual content, exploring phenomena such as the impact of real-world events on websites' content or circulation of linguistic/visual tropes across groups.

Key Findings

- The **identification of far-right online spaces** allows for better monitoring of radical milieux.
- The study of discussions and shared images **reinforces** our understanding of the far-right ideologies promoted on the internet.
- The analysis of **metadata** sheds light on the structural mechanisms and patterns organizing (and sustaining the growth of) the far-right online ecosystem.
- Reflecting on the project findings, ExID members assess the effects **AI technologies** have on the spread of extremist ideas online.

INFORMATION IN THE EU'S DIGITALISED GOVERNANCE

project-indigo.eu
Lead PI: herwig.hoffman@uni.lu

About

The project INDIGO addresses pressing issues affecting the future of democratic governance in Europe given advanced machine learning-based algorithms in public decision making. The project builds on an interdisciplinary team of experts in Luxembourg, Barcelona, Freiburg, Helsinki, and Karlsruhe organized in working groups composed of legal scholars, social scientists, and computer science experts on artificial intelligence and machine learning. The project teams study the interactions of new technologies and their impact on concepts of democratic accountability, the rule of law, fundamental rights and principles, and the use of expert knowledge in public decision-making.

Key Findings

- Provides a systematic and analytical disclosure of the automation, AI, and algorithms exploitation in public administration
- Provides a holistic assessment of the impact of automatization in public administration on fundamental rights
- Reveals the challenges arising of automatization in public administration and potential threats to fundamental rights and realization of administrative process principles
- Proposes safeguards of the exploitation of information technologies in public administration based in European law and administrative process principles

POPULIST BACKLASH, DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING, AND THE CRISIS OF THE RULE OF LAW IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

About

The project POPBACK studies the mechanisms 'exclusionary populist' movements use to increase their power by undermining the Rule of Law (RoL) and eroding the divide between the public and private domains in law, the economy, and the media. The project investigates the factors that make states vulnerable or resilient to such strategies and how societal actors seek to cope with them. It compares Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and Turkey, all of which have experienced populist success but differ regarding their institutional structures, permitting comparison.

POPBACK
Populist Backlash, Democratic Backsliding, and the Crisis of the Rule of Law in the European Union

popback.org
Lead PI: G.Schnyder@lboro.ac.uk

Key Findings

- The POPBACK project seeks to investigate '**coping mechanisms**' of key stakeholders (such as journalists and civil society actors) with exclusionary populist regimes. We seek to encourage dissemination and cross-fertilisation among other channels through the Cambridge CSaP International Policy Fellows who share their first-hand experiences in copying with such governments and - in turn - can learn from the projects findings.
- To reach a wider, non-academic audience we use **artistic performances** to make people think about the embodied performativity and rhetoric of populists.
- In terms of academic impact, we seek to add a novel perspective on **populism** by integrating political economic and legal questions and methodologies (e.g. social network analysis of media ownership structures; a new method of conceptualising and measuring the Rule of Law) with the predominant political science literature.

QUALIFY UNIFICATION IN EUROPE FOR SHIFTING TRUST: A COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON MUSLIMS RESPONSES TO THE POLITICS OF THREAT IN FRANCE, UK, SPAIN AND NORWAY

QUEST

Qualify Unification in Europe for Shifting Trust

Muslim' responses to the politics of threat

France – UK – Spain - Norway

norface.net/project/quest

Lead PI: polialexandra@yahoo.fr

About

QUEST is a cross-national three-year project focused on the shifting nature of identities and representations of Muslims in four European contexts: France, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Two phases of empirical research shape the deployment of the project focusing on the scale of cities. In a period of growing anxiety and mistrust, the project involves tracing the discourses and mechanisms through which Muslims are folded into 'the politics of threat.' The second phase of the project highlights and deepens based on an original ethnographic data collection the representations and experience of Muslims to identify individual and collective discourses, practices, and strategies in the re-elaboration process of what it means to 'be Muslim' in the context of a polarised Europe.

Key Findings

- A historical and place-based **framework** for understanding how Muslims have appeared in the politics of threat
- Up-to-date research from **four EU city contexts** on the shifting nature of identities and representations in relation to Muslim populations
- The role played by different **civil society actors** in helping to bridge the difference between representations and the shifting nature of identities relating to Islam and Muslims in contemporary Europe.

RECONNECTING CITIZENS TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE?

lse.ac.uk/accounting/carr/research/Reconnect

Lead PI: M.Lodge@lse.ac.uk

About

The current age of political turbulence – expressed through citizen dissatisfaction and populist politics – represents a fundamental challenge to the authority of the institutions of the administrative state. As public administration is central to democratic governance, as it connects citizens to the state, it is central to explore sources of citizen disconnection and administrative efforts to reconnect citizens with the state. ReConnect investigates how calls for more 'responsive' administrative state institutions have developed – both among citizens and politicians – and how the administrative state has sought to become more responsive, especially when simultaneously faced with expectations of neutrality and impartiality.

Key Findings

- Focus on the importance of the **administrative 'frontline' for the democratic legitimacy** of the state
- Enhanced understanding of the ways in which administrative states seek to increase **engagement** with citizens to achieve policy objectives
- Comparison of trends pointing to considerable **variations** within and across jurisdictions
- Contribution to debates about **administrative burdens on citizens** and differentiated understandings of citizen vulnerability in public services.

THE RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE IN EUROPE

rude.uni-frankfurt.de
Lead PI: rossteutscher@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

About

The project RUDE examines whether and how urban-rural residency is related to divides in legitimacy beliefs, social identities, perceptions of injustice and threat, political and social attitudes, and political behavior of European citizens. First, it deals with shifting identities and their consequences for democratic governance and political representation. Second, it examines the role played by globalization: increasing rural-urban economic divides create social status threats that exacerbate rural-urban political divides. In this way, the project will combine a broad comparative study of all European countries with an in-depth analysis of five established European democracies.

Key Findings

- The empirically grounded identification and description of **rural-urban differences** in politically and socially relevant behaviors and attitudes informs and contextualizes current debates in politics and the media
- An innovative and evidence-based cross-country assessment of citizens' rural-urban identity and resentment broadens our knowledge about **place-based attachments and grievances**
- These contributions help explain contemporary rural-urban **divides** in behaviors and attitudes. They situate the importance of local geography, i.e. citizens immediate social and economic contexts in current challenges to democracy.
- Taken together, the project's findings yield a solid foundation for strategies to foster social and political **cohesion** and **representation** in European societies

SEPARATION OF POWERS FOR 21ST CENTURY EUROPE

Separope

separope.eu
Lead PI: C.Eckes@uva.nl

About

SepaRope is the first empirically-grounded and comparative project rethinking the theory and practices of Separation of powers in the present-day European Union. SepaRope demonstrates in combined horizontal and vertical inquiries how recent economic and political developments affect the EU's institutional framework and the anchoring of EU decision-making in national legitimacy. It combines conceptual constitutional analysis with empirical research in three fields (Economic and Monetary Union, migration, trade) in which the EU decision-making is controversial, rights-sensitive, and illustrative of recent power shifts.

Key Findings

- The project explicates who loses and who gains **powers** when procedures and practices change
- Target audiences for societal impact are **national policy-makers**, as well as c**ivil servants in the EU institutions**
- The findings inform the interpretation of **competence** and **procedural norms**

HOW TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE RESHAPES POLITICS: TECHNOLOGY, ELECTIONS, AND POLICIES

TECHNO
Research Project

techno-norface.net
Lead PI: henning.finseraas@ntnu.no

About

Technological change disrupts labor markets in advanced democracies and creates fears about unemployment and the future of work. While it is well-established that rapid technological progress has significant economic effects, its political consequences remain largely unexplored. This project aims to study how technological change in the workplace contributes to political transformations, the adoption of policies to address change and the political consequences of such policies. The project is organized into four complementary work packages (WP). The project will contribute to understanding how the grievances generated by technological change manifest themselves politically.

Key Findings

- The project findings Inform policy-makers on whether voters vulnerable to technological change want policies directed at **compensation, retraining or regulation of new technology**
- The project informs the public about the role of technological changes for the growth of **populism**
- The project informs policy-makers on efficient policy tools at their disposal to **reduce the negative effects** of labour-replacing technological change

THE THREATS AND POTENTIALS OF A CHANGING POLITICAL INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

THREATPIE

threatpie.eu
Lead PI: dnh@sam.sdu.dk

About

The THREATPIE project examines how current changes in political information affect the conditions for a healthy democracy. Based on the concept of 'political information environment' (PIE), it considers the supply and demand of political information. Supply refers to the quantity and quality of news and public affairs content provided by traditional and new media; request captures the amount and type of information the public consumes. The project aims at achieving these goals through a series of comparative, innovatively designed studies, including web-tracking, comparative surveys, focus groups, and survey-embedded experiments in 10+ countries across Europe and the US.

Key Findings

Perceptions:
- Citizens, politicians, and journalists across countries share concerns about today's information environments
- Mis- and disinformation as a threat to information environments are particularly highlighted
- News avoidance and selective exposure are not perceived as major threats

Facts:
- Our results show that the concerns regarding mis- and disinformation are justified, with substantial variance across countries
- Selective exposure does not appear to be a major threat in European information environments

Solutions:
- The quality of information environments are key to strengthening citizens' knowledge base
- Citizens are receptive to quality contents, and even to corrections of misinformation

THREAT, IDENTITY, AND DISSENT: UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES

UNDPOLAR

undpolar.org
Lead PI: t.kuppens@rug.nl

About

UNDPOLAR project has three main objectives. First, to determine how identities and threats combine to generate multiple polarized attitudes. They identify subpopulations with unique belief systems or threat networks, and investigate how these are related to identities, polarization, and political behavior. Second, to use experimental research to test causal effects of identities and threats on polarization. They focus on economic inequality, meritocracy, collective narcissism, and collective threats. Third, democratic innovations such as citizen fora have been developed to overcome polarization. They will test whether using our insights on threats and identity can make such fora more effective.

Key Findings

- Political polarization is a complex process in which ideas, identities, attitudes and threats figure centrally. Depolarization strategies will therefore have to focus on **all these levels**, and not merely at identities.
- The levels of polarization **differ greatly between countries**, and that inclusive political institutions are conducive to lower levels of polarization. Institutional engineers and policy makers concerned with polarization should therefore try to implement consensual and inclusive political institutions.
- The polarization **does not automatically translate** into political violence. Instead, polarized groups will turn to violence if they feel their voices are not heard.
- **Citizens' assemblies** can be a conditional way of depolarizing citizens. When citizens are allowed to discuss salient political issues, with very diverse others in a face-to-face discussion, their interaction could lessen polarization.

Website
www.norface-governance.eu

Twitter
norface_GOV

Email Address
spc@norface-governance.eu