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Science-based journalism
for democracy

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ANNUAL REPORT

2024

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FACTA 2024. Towards a fully sustainable independent public interest media in Italy

FACTA is an **independent non-profit media outlet** in Italy, dedicated to **science-based investigative journalism** aimed at strengthening **democracy**. Our focus is on delivering evidence-based reporting on crucial issues such as **climate change, public health, and sustainability**, countering misinformation in a media landscape dominated by conflicts of interest.

FACTA reached significant milestones, including legal registration as a journalistic **media outlet** in Italy and launching a revamped **website**, which facilitates increased **community engagement**.

Through partnerships, notably with Il Bo Live, and participation in national and international networks, our investigative stories gained broader **visibility and public impact**. Our work on key topics such as **wetlands, PFAS pollution, and groundwater depletion** highlighted environmental and health challenges, positioning FACTA as a **new important player in the investigative independent media landscape in Italy**.

We made substantial progress in **financial sustainability**, increasing our operational budget to €97,000, up from around €32,00 in 2023. Our funding sources include grants, syndication, and partnerships. By the end 2025, we aim to secure a diversity of revenue streams, and expand our team and operations.

Community engagement remains central to our approach. In 2024, we launched a **newsletter** to keep our readers informed and involved in the investigative process. Moving forward, FACTA is committed to strategic growth, ensuring that we continue to provide independent, transparent journalism that **fosters informed decision-making and democratic participation**.

The FACTA Team

About FACTA

FACTA is an **independent Italian non-profit media outlet** that applies the scientific method to investigative and data journalism.

Our goal is to **promote democracy through science-based investigations**. We work in **Italy**, a country with enormous political, environmental, and social issues.

We strongly believe rigorous, transparent, open science, public interest journalism can help better **inform the public debate and build scientific citizenship**.

OUR MISSION

Science-based journalism for democracy. This is our mission: promoting the democratic process through **independent investigative journalism built on science**.

It is not just a matter of holding scientific knowledge. Scientific citizenship is about **making informed decisions**. Science shapes the **most pressing challenges we face today**, from the climate crisis to public health, from technology to sustainability.

That's why being scientifically informed is a **democratic process** - and our goal is to give our contribution reporting on scientific topics deeply **connected to people's lives**.

OUR WORK

We live and work in **Italy**, where **independent information** is at risk. The Italian media landscape is controlled by a handful of powerful private groups, frequently caught up in conflicts of interest. Public broadcasting is under the sway of political influence. **Investigative science journalism** in the public interest is scarce, and science-related topics with huge societal impacts are underreported. For example, the **climate crisis** finds very little coverage in legacy media, while fossil fuel companies are the biggest advertisers in major national newspapers.

For this reason, our work is to **provide our community with rigorous, evidence-based, independent public interest journalism**, crucial for informed decision-making in an era of misinformation.

Adopting a **clear and transparent method**, our team combines data analysis, community engagement, field reporting and digital tools to cover interconnected topics where science directly impacts local communities in our country. We investigate on **climate, environment, ecology, sustainability and health**, starting from real and often underreported problems.

OUR TEAM

We are a passionate group of **6 people** who strongly believe that good science journalism can be a powerful tool for democracy. We have **strong expertise in science and data journalism, multimedia production, data analysis and visualisations.**



■ Science & Data journalism

Elisabetta Tola

Freelance chief editor at Il BO Live and presenter of Radio3Scienza at RAI Radio3. Science and data journalist, Ph.D in Microbiology. Tow-Knight fellow 2019 Graduate School of Journalism, CUNY. Co-founder and CEO of the science communication agency formicablu. Co-founder and President of FACTA.



■ Science journalism & Multimedia production

Giulia Bonelli

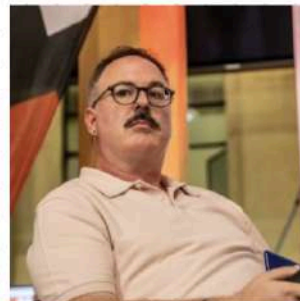
Freelance science journalist and video editor. Mainly covers climate, environment, astronomy, and space exploration. Regular contributor to the magazine Global Science edited by the Italian Space Agency. Senior consultant at the science communication agency formicablu. Co-founder and board member of FACTA.



■ Management & Project development

Francesca Conti

Freelance journalist and chairwoman of the science communication agency formicablu. Degree in Biology and Master in science communication. Extensive experience in management and in the development of communication strategies and products. Co-founder and board member of FACTA.



■ Science & Data journalism

Marco Boscolo

Freelance data journalist. Contributes to Il BO Live, LeScienze (the Italian edition of Scientific American) and RSI, the National Swiss Radio in Italian. Partner of the science communication agency formicablu. In 2020 co-authored the book Semi ritrovati, viaggio alla ricerca dell'agro-biodiversità and in 2024 he published La bianca scienza. Co-founder and partner of FACTA.

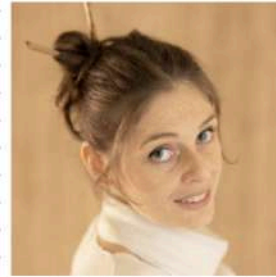




■ Science & Tech Journalism

Nicola Nosengo

Freelance science journalist. Partner of the science communication agency formicablu. Editor of Nature Regional Editions. Contributor to various international and national newspapers and communicator for national research bodies, such as Italian Space Agency, and international ones, such as EPFL in Lausanne. Author of four popular science books and several television programs for RAI. Co-founder and partner of FACTA.



■ Data analysis & Digital production

Benedetta Pagni

Freelance data analyst working on several journalistic and science communication projects on database creation, scientific literature review, data analysis, and application of Artificial Intelligent tools to satellite imagery and data analysis. Specialized in medical writing for a platform of doctors. Freelance consultant at formicablu and FACTA.



ADVISORY BOARD

- **Jeff Jarvis:** Director, Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism at CUNY's Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, New York, US
- **Aron Pilhofer:** James B. Steele Chair in Journalism Innovation at Temple University, Philadelphia, US
- **Carola Frediani:** Journalist and author specialising in cybersecurity and surveillance, author of the newsletter 'Guerre di rete'

TRANSPARENCY CODE

FACTA is a member of the [Reference Media Circle](#), a self-organised network of independent European public interest media. We sign up and adopt the [Reference Transparency Code](#), granting organisational transparency and editorial responsibility.

We adhere to the principles of public interest journalism and to the [Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists](#).

Since 2023, when FACTA was legally registered as a non-profit social enterprise, we publish our financial reports on our website.

[Download the financial report 2023 here](#)

Method

We **apply the scientific method to investigative and data journalism**.

This means a solid and data-driven methodology for journalistic work, involving **experts** and **researchers** during the investigations with clear agreements of mutual independence.

But also collecting needs from involved **communities** along the way. The result is what we call "**peer-reviewed journalism**".

FACTA'S METHOD, STEP BY STEP

1. **Clear hypotheses.** Inspired by experts and scientists, the needs of local communities, relevant literature and the public discourse, we define clear and explicit hypotheses to be tested.
2. **Data and literature.** The investigation begins: we search for literature reviews, relevant publications and reports, open and public data, and original or citizens' science experiments.
3. **Field reporting.** We go into the field to collect stories and experiences, with particular attention to how local communities deal with problems and the solutions they test.
4. **Feedback.** Along the way, we ask experts of various scientific backgrounds to give feedback on the process, the data and our hypotheses. This peer-reviewed journalism approach is developed within a clear framework of respect for editorial independence.
5. **Final publication.** In syndication with other media, we publish our final report in an innovative format, experimenting with data, visualisation and multimedia.

Investigations 2024

This year we participated in **four major cross-border investigations** on wetlands, groundwaters, PFAS and climate neutrality. Most of the stories were published in 2024, other follow-up articles will be published in 2025.

WASTED WETLANDS

From unwanted to protected, wetlands have recently entered the spotlight. This focus stems from the urgent, almost desperate race to employ every possible strategy to mitigate the effects of climate crisis and global change. We investigated the underreported role of wetlands' degradation in Italy, and the connection between this ongoing destruction and some of the most severe consequences of the climate crisis.



Authors: Elisabetta Tola, Giulia Bonelli, Benedetta Pagni

Area: Adriatic, Italy, Mediterranean basin, Tyrrhenian Sea

Topics: exploitation, landscape, salt pans, water, wetlands

Funders: SISSA Interdisciplinary Laboratory of Trieste - Climate Arena Fellowships 2023 - Journalismfund Europe

Syndication: Il Bo Live, Indip

Investigation scrollytelling: <https://facta.eu/focus-on/swampower/>

Wetlands are distinct ecosystems saturated by water. They are vital CO2 emissions sponges capable of locking up carbon for thousands of years. Wetlands also boast exceptional biodiversity, serving as nesting and refuge sites for many migratory species. They buffer against rising saltwater levels, protect freshwater basins, and act as barriers against coastal erosion. They help renew soil fertility and vitality and are a fantastic tool against floods and extreme weather events.

For this reason, countries signed the UN Ramsar Convention in 1971 to conserve our wetlands.

Yet, wetlands remain one of the most threatened ecosystems in Europe as countries actively encourage exploitation, supporting intensive agriculture, industrial extraction and mass tourism. Most wetlands in Europe – the bloc's most significant carbon sinks and biodiversity hotspots – are exploited beyond repair due to decades of industrial activity.

In Italy, for instance, land reclamation covered, destroyed, and eliminated a significant percentage of wetlands between the late 1800s and the mid-1900s. Intensive agriculture, coastal construction, mass tourism, and industrial fishing did the rest. Reconsideration began only after much of these precious environments had already been destroyed. Today, Italy has lost about 75% of its original wetlands.

We are launching a series, "Wasted Wetlands" which we hope to one day rename "Restored Wetlands."

This series will explore some of the most important wetlands in our country — those playing a crucial role for local communities, those most at risk, and some already undergoing recovery and improvement. The series will combine historical information, investigative journalism, on-the-ground reporting, scientific data, and experimental use of remote sensing and AI-based satellite image analysis to visualise the health and changes of the environments at the centre of our stories.

Part of this journey — during the first few months of 2024 — was also done with an international consortium of colleagues based in other EU countries with significant wetlands loss: Ireland, which has lost 90% of its wetlands, and Germany (80%).

In Ireland, the investigation exposed how two semi-state bodies that control 20% of Ireland's peatlands continue to exploit them for commercial gain. We revealed the direct impact of poor climate policy: plantation forestry and wind farms on peatlands, highlighting resulting water quality impacts and continued draining of peats for speculative planning applications.

In Germany, we revealed how politicians circumvent urging climate issues by opposing the Nature Restoration Law. We showed in Germany how conservative political inaction and lobby work is not only postponing essential steps toward landscape restoration, but also leaving farmers with no answer to their questions about the social-economic consequences in the case of a large-scale rewetting of agricultural peatlands.

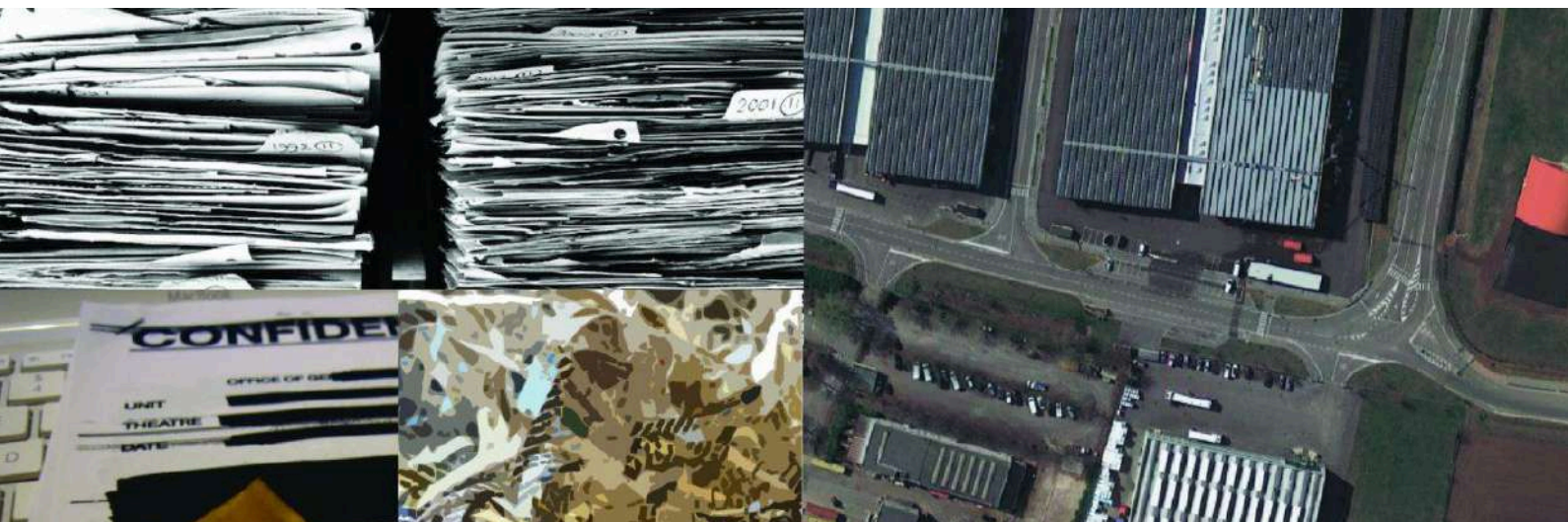
The “Wasted Wetland” Italian version has been published on FACTA and in syndication with *Il Bo Live* magazine, edited by the University of Padua, *Indip*, independent investigative media outlet in Sardinia, and *Foresight*, magazine edited by the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Climate Change (CMCC).

WASTED WETLANDS - ARTICLES

- [Una serie sulle zone umide del Mediterraneo](#), FACTA, 30.04.2024
- [Wasted Wetlands: il patrimonio nascosto della Sardegna](#), FACTA, 01.05.2024
- [Wasted Wetlands. Cervia, la salina sommersa dall'alluvione in Romagna](#), FACTA, 19.07.2024
- [L'incompiuta Maristanis: il parco che mai fu, tra eolico e pesticidi](#), FACTA, 7.10.2024
- [Wasted Wetlands - una nuova serie sulle zone umide del Mediterraneo](#), Il Bo Live, 29.04.2024 (syndication)
- [Wasted Wetlands. Zone umide, il patrimonio nascosto della Sardegna](#), Il Bo Live, 30.04.2024 (syndication)
- [Wasted Wetlands. Cervia, la salina sommersa dall'alluvione in Romagna](#), Il Bo Live, 18.04.2024 (syndication)
- [L'incompiuta Maristanis](#), 6.10.24, Indip

FOREVER LOBBYING PROJECT

FACTA was part of this cross-border project investigating the hidden price of PFAS pollution. The investigation revealed that PFAS remediation across Europe could cost up to €2 trillion over a 20-year period. We exposed the actual cost of the “forever chemicals” pollution on the environment, science, and politics. In particular, our team focused on the cost of PFAS pollution in Southern Veneto, Italy.



Authors: Marco Boscolo, Elisabetta Tola

Area: Adriatic, Italy, Mediterranean basin, Tyrrhenian Sea

Topics: lobbying, money, pollution

Funders: Pulitzer Center, the Broad Reach Foundation, Journalismfund Europe, and IJ4EU

Syndication: Il Bo Live

Investigation website: <https://foreverpollution.eu/>

PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are a family of over 10,000 man-made chemicals widely used in consumer products and industrial processes and equipment, from toilet paper to cable insulation in rockets. Their miracle properties, however, have fateful downsides. Their persistence in the environment makes them almost indestructible without human intervention. PFAS are also toxic, and linked to cancers, hormonal and immune disruption.

Over a year, a team of 46 journalists and 29 media partners, including FACTA, investigated an ongoing massive, orchestrated lobbying and disinformation campaign led by the PFAS industry and their allied organisations to water down a proposal to ban “forever chemicals” in the EU and shift the burden of environmental pollution onto society, threatening the economic equilibrium of European nations. This is the Forever Lobbying Project. We found that PFAS remediation across Europe could cost up to €2 trillion over a 20-year period to clean-up legacy PFAS pollution and ongoing emissions in Europe, with an annual bill of minimum €100 billion to remediate emissions, if these remain unrestricted.

Pushing the boundaries of journalistic investigation into lobbying and misinformation through an academic approach, the Forever Lobbying Project team subjected the key arguments deployed by lobbyists in the plastics sector to a stress test, showing that most of them were misleading, scaremongering and even false. The team built on the concept of “expert-reviewed journalism”, pioneered in 2023 with the Forever Pollution Project, this time involving 18 international academics and researchers in Zürich, Stockholm, Toronto, or Rotterdam, from environmental chemistry to AI.

The journalists collected over 14,000 unpublished documents on PFAS, constituting the world’s largest collection to date on the topic. This trove of documents is now available to the public in the Industry Documents Library at the University of California, San Francisco, home of the famous “Tobacco Papers”, and in the Toxic Docs database of Columbia University, New York, and City University of New York.

Our stories are also available in Italian and can be accessed directly from each story page. The Italian version has been published in Il Bo Live magazine, edited by the University of Padova.

FOREVER LOBBYING PROJECT - ARTICLES

- [PFAS: il conto salato pagato dai cittadini per avere acqua pulita](#), FACTA, 14.02.2025
- [PFAS: ripulire, risanare, vietare?](#) FACTA, 20.02.2025
- [PFAS: il conto salato pagato dai cittadini per avere acqua pulita](#), Il Bo Live, 14.01.2025 (syndication)
- [PFAS: ripulire, risanare, vietare?](#) Il Bo Live, 23.01.2025 (syndication)

UNDER THE SURFACE

FACTA was part of this cross-border investigation on groundwater, revealing that Europe's aquifers are disappearing and what remains is facing near-irreversible pollution. We focused on the drought affecting the water basins around the Po Delta region, engaging with fishermen, rice farmers and biologists.



Authors: Elisabetta Tola, Marco Boscolo

Area: Emilia-Romagna, Europe, Italy, Po river

Topics: drought, groundwater, water

Funders: Journalismfund Europe

Partners: Le Monde (France) - Datadista (Spain) - Reporters United (Greece) - De Standaard (Belgium) - Dagbladet Information (Denmark) - Investico (Netherlands)

Syndication: Il Bo Live

Investigation website: <https://europeanwaters.eu/about/>

UNDER THE SURFACE - ARTICLES

- [Chi ci rimette se non c'è acqua, o se ce n'è troppa?](#), FACTA, 13.07.2024
- [La crisi idrica del Po e il futuro che l'aspetta](#), FACTA, 05.07.2024
- [Under the surface, o dello stato di salute dei bacini idrici sotterranei europei](#), FACTA, 18.07.2024
- [Under the Surface: metodologia e composizione del consorzio di giornalisti di inchiesta](#), Il Bo Live, 17.05.2024 (syndication)
- [Under the surface, o dello stato di salute dei bacini idrici sotterranei europei](#), Il Bo Live, 17.05.2024 (syndication)
- [La crisi idrica del Po e il futuro che l'aspetta](#), Il Bo Live, 04.07.2024 (syndication)
- [Chi ci rimette se non c'è acqua, o se ce n'è troppa?](#), Il Bo Live, 12.07.2024 (syndication)

Budget 2024

After being incubated in the Italian science communication agency [formicablu](#) until the end of 2023, in 2024 FACTA worked to establish its financial sustainability. The organisation is now legally registered as a **non-profit social enterprise**, and aims at becoming fully sustainable by the end of 2025.

In 2024, the majority of revenue streams came from **grants** and **donations**, and we are exploring a **collaborative approach with research institutes and non corporate technical institutes**, producing journalism adopting FACTA's method with a mutual independent agreement.

Overall, sources of revenues come from a mix of journalism grants (70%), syndication with media, editorial companies, civic organisations, and research institutes (20%), and training and consultancy (10%).

FACTA's 2024 operational budget was **€ 97.150,95** which underlines a substantial growth from the incubation period. The 2023 [financial report](#) underlined a total value of production of € 31.922. Throughout 2024, we secured additional funding, resulting in a stronger position to stabilize the organization, and increase out growth capacity.

2024 operational budget was mainly composed by:

- Journalismfund: 9 individual grants to team members
- Syndication: Foresight, magazine edited by the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Climate Change (CMCC), *Il Bo Live*, magazine edited by the University of Padua
- International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA)
- formicablu: support to climate design thinking for target group engagement Arena for Journalism in Europe

The provisional operational budget is under review, and the definitive 2024 financial report will be uploaded on FACTA's website at the beginning of 2025, in compliance with our [transparency code](#).

Events, conferences, training

2024 was a busy year in terms of events, conferences and knowledge exchange among other media outlets. These are the events attended by FACTA's team, both to share the results of our investigations and to learn from others.

- **International Journalism Festival**, Perugia, 17-21 April 2024
- **Festival dell'Acqua, Staranzano**, 16-19 May 2024
- **Reference Media Circle meeting**, Mechelen, 27-28 May 2024
- **Dataharvest**, Mechelen, 29 May - 2 June 2024
- **EuroScience Open Forum**, Katowice, 12-15 June 2024
- **Folle di Scienza**, 6-7 September, Strambino
- **DIG Festival**, Modena, 19-22 September 2024
- **Conversazioni sul futuro**, Lecce, 16-20 October 2024
- **Climate Arena Conference**, Bologna, 17-19 October 2024
- **Colpin**, Madrid, 23-26 October 2024
- **Journalism Value Project study visit**, Lisbon, 4-8 November 2024
- **EDJNet meeting**, Budapest, 14-15 November 2024
- **Reference Media Circle meeting**, Berlin, 20-30 November 2024
- **Future Visions on Sciences Communication**, 3 December 2024

Networks and partnerships

We believe that **collaboration** is at the core of good journalism. That's why we constantly seek knowledge exchange, both at the editorial and non-editorial level.

We are members of the [Reference Media Circle](#), a self-organised, **European network of 24 independent media** collectively advocating for the well-being and financial sustainability of independent, public interest media. The network is currently incubated by [Arena for Journalism in Europe](#), another network FACTA is actively collaborating with.

We are also members of [EDJNet](#), a **network of media and data journalists** from all over Europe.

At the national level, we are building **collaborations and partnerships with other Italian independent media organisations** that face same challenges and have similar goals, in order to raise the voice of independent, public interest journalism in Italy.

Community, dissemination, impact

Our investigations would not be possible without an engaged audience that reads our stories and especially suggests how to improve our work.

We have a **strong core community of researchers, students, teachers, local administrations, NGOs, activists, and civil society organisations**. Many of them contribute to our reporting process, giving feedback on the hypothesis, the data and the results of our investigations.

We work in areas we know very well and connect with people of our territories. So all our articles are originally published in Italian, on FACTA or **in syndication with national outlets to amplify impact**.

WEBSITE

FACTA achieved an important milestone by being officially **registered as a journalistic media outlet in Italy**, a step that solidified our credibility and presence in the media landscape. This progress has been complemented by a **complete redesign of our website**, which now offers a more user-friendly experience, enhanced functionality, and a modernised design. The revamped site allows our audience to easily access our investigative stories and in-depth analysis, as well as our methodologies and supporting materials. As a central hub for our content, the website plays a crucial role in fostering engagement with our community, providing them with the tools to explore and interact with our work, while also amplifying the impact of our investigations.

MEDIA PARTNERSHIP

A key development in 2024 was the development of our media partnership. In particular, we established a solid collaboration with *Il Bo Live*, an influential outlet known for its academic and research-based reporting. This media partnership has significantly expanded the reach of our investigations, allowing us to engage with a broader audience and bring greater attention to important issues. By sharing our content with *Il Bo Live*, we have been able to leverage their established network and expertise in the field of science and cultural journalism, amplifying the impact of our reporting and increasing visibility for the critical stories we cover. This collaboration reflects our commitment to building strong, meaningful relationships with reputable media organisations to foster a wider dissemination of our work.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

As part of our ongoing efforts to improve communication and engagement with our audience, 2024 saw a shift in our social media strategy. Following the closure of our X (formerly Twitter) account, we made a deliberate decision to strengthen our presence on LinkedIn, a platform more suited to professional dialogue and research-oriented content. LinkedIn allows us to connect with a more targeted audience of academics, professionals, and decision-makers, creating a space for deeper discussions about our investigations and findings. This strategic pivot ensures that we remain connected to our core community while also reaching new individuals and organizations that can contribute to our mission.

FACTA'S NEWSLETTER

In 2024, we launched our very own newsletter in Italian, aimed at keeping our community informed about our ongoing projects, new investigations, and the latest updates from FACTA. The newsletter serves as a direct line of communication between us and our audience, offering an exclusive, curated digest of our most important work. By sending regular updates straight to the inboxes of our readers, we ensure they are always in the loop and can easily access our stories and findings. This initiative reinforces the collaborative nature of our work, as we continue to foster a community that actively participates in the investigative process.

Towards 2025

As we look towards 2025, FACTA is entering a phase of strategic growth and consolidation. In 2024, we reached significant milestones, including the finalisation of our official registration as a journalistic publication and a complete website overhaul, all of which have enhanced our ability to engage with and expand our community. Our media partnerships and our connection with national and international networks further our work's impact.

As we move forward, our financial trajectory reflects steady, sustainable growth. With a current annual budget of 100,000 euros, our goal is to reach 230-250,000 euros in the next 3-5 years—an ideal budget that will enable us to continue strengthening our team and refining our operations.

While we do not seek rapid growth, our focus will remain on solidifying our foundations, empowering our team, and expanding our reach, ensuring that we remain a trusted and impactful voice in investigative independent journalism.