



## From the Outside Looking In

**On a train** from Switzerland to Italy, in March 2008, Mirko Bischofberger came up with an idea for a website.

The son of an Italian mother and Swiss father, Bischofberger was reading an article in a Swiss newspaper about how prominent Italians could not make their voices heard through local media. He translated the article from German to Italian for his Sicilian-born girlfriend and her mother, who were traveling with him. “I started thinking this should be done systematically so that all Italians could have access to these articles.”

That evening Bischofberger, a doctoral student studying cell membrane biology in the laboratory of HHMI international research scholar Gisou van der Goot at the Federal Polytechnic School of Lausanne, hatched a plan with his girlfriend, Gaetana Restivo, and a friend based in the United States, Fabio Parisi. They would build a website named “ItaliaDallEstero.info,” or “Italy from Abroad.” It would post Italian translations of newspaper articles from around the world about Italy’s political situation.

“The general concept is to have an external view of what is happening in Italy,” says Bischofberger.

That outside view is necessary, he says, because Italy’s governing party, led by prime minister and billionaire media magnate Silvio Berlusconi, has control over most news outlets in Italy. “There is a lot of censorship in Italy. The government is not transparent by most standards,” he says, adding that several independent organizations, including Reporters without Borders and Freedom House, agree with him.

Since its April 2008 launch, ItaliaDallEstero.info has grown to include over 2,000 articles from more than 40 countries. Over 50 volunteers translate the articles; others confirm the translations’ accuracy. Each posting contains a link back to the original article. The site accepts no external funding. “We keep the site free of ads for the moment, to be completely unbiased,” explains Bischofberger.

Bischofberger seems to be a born communicator. He filmed a documentary about a Greek dialect spoken in certain parts of Italy (including the village Castrignano dei Greci, where he spent his childhood vacations) and is a regular contributor to the science section of the major Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. “There are many misunderstandings about science,” he says. “Those of us who understand science have a responsibility to explain it. The more you know, the more you have to share.”

ItaliaDallEstero.info has perhaps had the most obvious impact. With over 5,000 visitors every day, its articles “have been cited by politicians and journalists in Italy,” says Bischofberger. Those politicians’ Web pages and news articles carry links to his website, which has also had positive reviews from prominent Italian bloggers. “Now there is a movement that is building mistrust about Berlusconi’s honesty,” says Bischofberger. “We like to think we contributed a little piece to that movement.”

Among the website’s visitors is Bischofberger’s Ph.D. advisor. “I have read some of the original articles in Dutch and found them very interesting,” says van der Goot. “I think it’s great when someone identifies a problem and then does something to improve the situation.” —*Laura Bonetta*

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** If you can read Italian, visit [italiadallestero.info](http://italiadallestero.info).

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