

Zeus Protocol

When a warning is issued for domestic violence or persecutory acts, the perpetrator is also informed of the existence of specialized centres offering an integrated treatment approach centred on the awareness of his/her socially despicable and criminally punishable behaviour, with a view to enhancing his/her capability to restrain from and manage relational violence. In order to facilitate the access of warned individuals to the centres, the questore, starting with the one in Milan, and the local services have signed protocols which have often been named 'Zeus' protocols after the first case of abuse in Greek mythology. The resulting approach has produced positive results as regards the effectiveness of the warning issued by the questore.

Zeus Protocol – Year of activation

A review of the results achieved by the questore that have been implementing the Protocol for some time now has confirmed its effectiveness in terms of a decrease in reoffending. This shows that the focus on the offender as well as offender-centred preventive measures are essential and go hand in hand with the focus on victims' support. In order to spread this best practice, the Central anti-crime directorate of Polizia di Stato has participated as a stakeholder in ENABLE - Early Network-based Action against abusive Behaviours to Leverage victim's Empowerment – a European project coordinated by the Italian Centre for the promotion of mediation (Cipm) in Milan, between January 2021 and June 2023.

Insights

In 2018 the Anticrime Division of the Milan Police Headquarters signed the Zeus Protocol with the Italian Centre for Empowerment and Mediation (CIPM). The Protocol is an agreement on fighting Persecutory Acts and Abuse that aims at identifying abusive behaviours. The project is named after the 'first (known) abuser in history', whose domineering and controlling behavior in relationships is a stark reminder of the need to stop a budding Zeus from turning into a despot, and that inappropriate and violent behaviour should be nipped in the bud. Perpetrator programmes aim at improving the management of one's emotions, in the belief that timely action is needed to prevent violence from spiralling out of control and to stop it before it happens.

The protocol allows for a special synergy between Police Headquarters responders and CIPM operators involved in prevention actions. After giving the warning, the Questore 'formally invites' the warned person to contact CIPM operators in order to access free training courses on how to manage abusive behaviour, and, for instance, on how to control anger.

Other similar agreements, along the lines of the Zeus Protocol, have been signed by other Police Headquarters, including with CAM (Centro di Ascolto Maltrattanti - Listening Centre for Abusers), a charity which also provides free, confidential telephone counselling to help men out of their violent behaviour. Several other centres also offer free therapeutic pathways to help abusers become aware of their violent behaviour and restrain their impulses.

