The European Parliament and organised crime: 
the impending failure of the Alfano Committee

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Last year (spring 2012), I wrote an editorial for this journal in remembrance of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who were murdered on 23 May 1992 and 19 July 1992 respectively.1 Drawing on what Giovanni Falcone himself said shortly before his assassination about the spread of the Italian mafia, or in any event their criminal practices, throughout Western Europe, I wrote that his claims could only be evaluated properly by assembling a multinational group of experienced researchers from the various Member States to conduct the necessary in-depth investigation. Falcone argued as follows:

– Sicilian and Calabrian migrants had taken the mafia with them when they immigrated to other Union Member States;

– the elimination of internal border controls would ease the spread of mafia-like practices;

– the Italian mafia would take on other forms in other European countries because it had to adapt to different political and cultural environments;

– local criminal groups would increasingly pattern themselves on the Italian mafia by attempting to infiltrate government and the legitimate economy and by committing all sorts of violent acts against government officials.

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In my editorial expounding on these ideas, I argued that — in view of the political sensitivity of this issue and its strategic importance for the European Union’s policy (whether actual or potential) on organised crime — the European Commission (ECom) should act in consultation with the European Council (ECoun) to fund an investigation of this kind, and that the European Parliament (EP) should cooperate with the national parliaments in delivering the necessary political support for such a risky undertaking.

But it was not to be. In accordance with the European Parliament’s resolution of 25 October 2011 on organised crime in the European Union, the European Parliament decided on 14 March 2012 to set up a special committee which, in the accompanying press release (3 May 2012), is described by its chairperson Sonia Alfano as an “anti-mafia” committee. The word “mafia” has two meanings, at least as she used it. On the one hand, in the press release it clearly refers to elements of the Italian mafia, for example, the Sicilian mafia and the ‘Ndrangheta, and suggests that these groups have now spread outside of Italy and become an EU-wide problem. On the other hand, the press release also suggests that organised crime outside of Italy has increasingly come to resemble the Italian mafia, but that Member States such as Sweden and the Netherlands evidently refuse to acknowledge that fact and take the special steps that have turned out to be necessary — for example, in Italy — to fight the mafia effectively, such as forbidding jailed Mafiosi from communicating with other prisoners (“hard jail”). Another significant point is that — again according to the press release — the chairperson’s father was murdered by the Sicilian mafia in 1993 and that she has fought organised crime ever since. That would explain why she describes the committee set up by the EP as an “anti-mafia” committee. She evidently wants to use the committee to continue her fight at European level. It should be noted that Rita Borsellino — Paolo Borsellino’s daughter — is also a member of the committee.

Before considering whether this “special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering” has produced or will produce acceptable answers to the questions raised in my editorial of last year, it is important to note that its assignment is described much more neutrally and broadly in the decision than in the relevant press release. The remit of the 45-member committee is to analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and their impact on the Union and its Member States and to propose appropriate


\[3\) European Parliament decision of 14 March 2012 on setting up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, its powers, numerical composition and term of office (P7_TA(2012)0078).\]