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Italian MEP pulls no punches in Afghanistan report.

Pino Arlacchi is a liberal Italian MEP who arrived at the European Parliament last year with an extraordinary record of achievements.

He is a sociologist specialising in the study of organised crime who in the 1980s began looking at the mafia in his native Calabria and has since studied their habits in Sicily and elsewhere (including a book on why the mafia is not in Sardinia).

But Arlacchi is no ivory-tower academic. He was an adviser to the Italian interior ministry and helped set up an anti-mafia agency. He survived an assassination attempt in 1993, and was under armed guard for 13 years. As under secretary-general of the United Nations in 1997-2002, he led its fight against terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking, and was one of the driving forces behind the Palermo convention (officially, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime).

Arlacchi has a reputation for straight talk, and his most substantial work as an MEP to date – a report on Afghanistan that was approved by the foreign affairs committee on Tuesday (9 November) – shows why. It is an attempt “to explain why so little has been achieved in Afghanistan in spite of the huge amounts of money and effort expended over the past nine years”.