A “View from Across” (in the Other Direction)

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From the standpoint of an outside observer with « a view from across », the practical result reached in the Morrison case seems reasonable. It is highly probable that in a similar situation – that is, supposing jurisdiction could be secured under the relevant rules applicable before, say the courts of Member States as against foreign-third-State-domiciled defendants AND imagining private attorney general actions for violations of trans-European securities regulations – courts over this side of the Atlantic (and for realistic symmetry, we’d need to think in terms of the rulings by the Court of Justice of the European Union as relayed by the courts of the Member States) would not (whatever the reasoning involved) have extended the scope of domestic economic regulation to an “F-cubed” action. However, the concrete result reached in this particular case is clearly not the point in issue. Nor indeed is there any reason not to adhere to the important policy objective of discouraging global forum-shoppers (or their lawyers) attracted by the well-known magnetic properties of US civil procedure in purely financial matters when private punitive-damage-actions are available. The real question is the *approach* adopted by the Supreme Court in its first decision relating to the ambit of the Securities and Exchange Act in an international setting.

I’ll simply emphasise a few points that might be of specific interest to European observers on the Supreme Court’s new “transactional test”. (I’ll refrain from speculating here as to the impact of the potential new “anti-Morrison” legislation to which Gilles has just posted the links), or to the difference it might have made on the overall result had Justice Kagan, who authored the US amicus brief favoring the “substantial conduct” test, been sitting on the Court). In order to define the reach of § 10(b) of the Securities Exchange Act 1934 (and thereby of SEC 10b-5), the Court decided that these various stringent informational/transparency requirements apply only to *transactions in securities listed on US exchanges* or otherwise sold within the US:

1. It comes as a surprise (and disappointment) to see the Supreme Court

turning its back on several decades of (what looked from over here like) a widely shared and carefully tailored functional approach (initiated by the Court of Appeals of the Second Circuit whose case-law is discussed extensively) to the determination of the scope of federal economic regulation, in favor of a bright-line rule based on a regression to the presumption against extra-territoriality. As the concurrence suggests, haven't we been there before? Well over here, we certainly have. Obviously, the EU is only just beginning to grapple with similar issues (first in respect of the extraterritorial scope of European competition law, then in diverse areas involving the international reach of directives, such as the Agency Directive in the controversial *Ingmar* case) but if intra-European (as opposed to the international reach of "federal" or trans-European legislation) conflicts are anything to go by (and indeed much has been written on this point within the US on the striking parallelism between methodological approaches in international arena and in intra-federal situations) then the quest for a "simple" or "certain" conflicts rule designed to provide legal security to economics actors has proved at best elusive, at worst unfair. Whether or not one decides to adhere to a dogmatic principle of territoriality or its contrary, surely the only real issue is whether it is reasonable in functional or policy terms, given the connections between the conduct, its effects and the market the statute was designed to regulate, to extend such a statute in a given case. It is doubtful indeed that the concept of "territoriality" is of much help.

2. Of course, framed in these terms, a functional approach provides little predictability. Over here, this has been a well-known war-cry since the mid-sixties against the importation of any form of American legal realism in the sphere of the conflict of laws (let alone any weird law-and or, worse, critical legal thinking in any other sphere, domestic or global…). However, it also seems clear (from over here) that in the particular case of the reach of US Securities regulation, the courts (and the Second Circuit in particular) have, over time, attempted to refine this test – albeit, as inevitable with any judicial-interpretation-in-progress, with results that may sometimes lack coherence – so that it seems a shame that these painstaking efforts be set aside in one fell swoop. It appears then that the real debate concerns canons of statutory construction which involve far more than the sole issue of the international reach of the Exchange Act and extends to the whole sensitive question of judicial law-making when

statutes are either silent or fuzzy in novel contexts. (Paradoxically, over here, the opposition between conservative originalists/fundamentalists and more policy or society-attuned liberals is considerably less violent than in the US on issues of statutory interpretation and the role of the courts, although one still comes across (in France) people who claim to believe that case-law interpreting the Code civil of 1804 is not a source of law, etc.; there are also signs of renewed debate on the role of the courts in the context of the new Constitutional review procedure in the French courts (the "QPC" 2010), over whether new Constitutional review should extend or not to judicial constructions of statutes). One is however struck by the fact that although the previous policy-based, conducts-and-effects approach practiced by the courts is stigmatized as having no textual foundation, one may also wonder, in turn, where exactly the dogma of territoriality comes from.

3. So we've been there before (I think). But even if we accept that bright-line rules and dogmatic presumptions have their virtues, and may indeed work adequately if the courts are allowed sufficient margin to set them aside, these issues on statutory interpretation do not address the crucial question of building an appropriate response to the various dysfunctions of global markets. Of course, as the Court very rightly points out, financial markets are the object of very different national conceptions of regulation: there is no shared/uniform answer to the question of what a securities fraud actually is (I'd personally go further, of course, to say that there is no uniform answer to anything, but that is no doubt quite beside the point). But the existence of "true" conflicts of economic relation is not new. In the area of antitrust, the Court's appeal to positive comity in such a context, in *Empagram*, seems more attractive from this side of the Ocean. More importantly, in a world that is complex and messy (as Hannah has excellently pointed out), would it not be more judicious to devote energy to defining the requirements of reasonableness in the scope given to domestic regulation rather than asserting the primacy of a "principle of territoriality" which is not only culturally conditioned in the common law tradition (as I have often explained elsewhere), undefinable as a general matter, and totally maladjusted to contemporary interconnected markets. Indeed, the concurring opinion of Justices Stevens and Ginsburg provides an excellent hypothetical to illustrate the way in which the court's territorial, transaction-based test is likely to

create a loophole for many types of securities fraud.

4. My last point will be a hotch-potch of observations which may only interest the European private international lawyer-observer. First, as I have often tried to make clear in a tradition of legal thinking in which the public/private distinction is still deeply ingrained, it is very hard here to contend that this is a conflict of "private" interests or private laws, notwithstanding the private actions/actors involved. Second, contrary to much that has been written, often misguidedly, over here on the *Vivendi* class litigation, this decision is not necessarily going to "protect foreign (French) interests" (whatever one may suppose them to be) nor prevent trans-Atlantic class actions including European investors as claimants or European firms as defendants, as long as the new transactional criteria are satisfied. Third, it seems a little strange that at a time when the US Supreme Court is prudently retreating from extraterritoriality (whatever its reasons), the EU is doing exactly the reverse. Its policy appears to be to extend the effects of EU legislation to situations which are largely connected to third countries (after *Owusu*, see the new Alimentary Obligations Regulation or the Succession draft proposal). Finally, as I have already had the opportunity to point out elsewhere, considerable energy is currently being put into the reform of the Brussels I Regulation, following hard on the heels of Rome I and II. That is of course all very well. But the Morrison litigation shows that our models are no doubt already out of date (methodologically, epistemologically). Instead of doing things like promoting party autonomy in contract throughout the world (the latest initiative of the Hague Conference on PIL!?) ought we not to be thinking ahead to the massive new types of difficulties that (for instance) cross-border/global securities fraud is now raising?