Surprise? Yes and No

I am grateful to Horatia Muir Watt, a professor of private international and comparative law at the Paris Institute of Political Science, to have accepted to comment on the recent In Zone Brands *decision of the* Cour de cassation *ruling that an American anti-suit injunction could be declared enforceable in France*.

To my mind, this case was well decided. But did it really come as such a surprise, as Gilles' and Raphael's comments seem to imply? Well, yes and no. But before explaining why, I want to start with two parentheses about legal comparison.

1. Firstly, it is wise before drawing conclusions from a decision of the Cour de cassation to consulting the accompanying preparatory documents (the "Rapport" of the juge-rapporteur, whose name figures at the bottom of the decision and from whom the Report can be obtained directly, when it is not published spontaneously on the Cour de cassation's website, and/or the "avis" of the Advocate general). The attention of the common law world has often been drawn to the importance of these documents, particularly since Mitch Lasser's magnificent "Judicial Self-Portraits" [1], in which he explains that behind the concise one-sentenced syllogism which constitutes an "arrêt", the various rapports and avis which accompany the decision are functional equivalents to the longer motivation of judgments in the common law tradition – and may indeed reveal dissenting opinions within the court ¨[2]. In this particular case, the thoughtful Report of Madame Pascal makes it easier to understand, for instance, how the procedure developed before the lower courts and, perhaps more importantly, the position of the Cour de cassation in respect of the implications of West Tankers.
2. Secondly, countries belonging to the civilian legal tradition do not constitute a homogeneous block with a single legal perspective on such institutions as anti-suit injunctions. Of course, the coexistence of the civilian and common law cultures within the European common judicial area has now revealed profound divergences on jurisdictional issues – unsurprisingly, since such issues are linked to conceptions about the very function of adjudication – , and it may well have been that before the antisuit/forum non conveniens crisis, such differences were underestimated on the civilian side, either through the inadequacy of

> comparative legal studies, or in a misguided quest for legal uniformity. However, while the epistemological and methodological divide between these two legal traditions is undisputable, it does not mean that within the civilian "camp", there are not equally significant differences in legal reasoning or indeed in judicial policy. In the particular case of anti-suit injunctions (and much could also be said in the same vein about forum non conveniens), the French courts cannot be said to have been hostile to anti-suit injunctions (beyond the dictum in the Stolzenberg decision, to which I shall come back) and their position on this point certainly cannot be inferred from the often cited German or Belgian cases which have explicitly refused to recognize or enforce anti-suit injunctions. Moreover, legal scholarship on this point, to which the Rapport is extremely attentive, has been far from antagonistic.

This having been said, the content of the arrêt of 14th October 2009 appears to me to conform to the general orientation of the Cour de cassation's case-law. Firstly, as the report itself emphasises, the Cour has itself, in a pre-Regulation insolvency case, awarded something that looks very like an anti-suit injunction, in the form of an order to desist from judicial proceedings abroad sanctioned by an "astreinte" (a sum of money by way of a private penalty to be paid to the claimant per day of non-performance/obedience to the order): see Banque Worms (Cass civ 1re, 19 nov. 2002). In that case, the Advocate general's Conclusions and the Report, which cite Gilles Cuniberti's own work on this point, show that the Court was paying particular attention to the risks attendant to the use of such injunctions insofar as they might be perceived to intrude on the jurisdiction of foreign courts, and is careful to emphasize that the French courts were themselves asserting jurisdiction in this case on grounds which justified their attempt to retain the proceedings before them. Secondly, the Cour de cassation was recently willing to allow effect to be given to an American judgment awarding a large penalty against a company director for contempt of court (Cass civ 28 janvier 2009, n° 07-11.729 Bull civ. I, n°15), sweeping aside the argument according to which contempt of court is quasi-penal in nature and therefore contrary to French public policy. This was already the Cour de cassation's position in Stolzenberg (Cass civ 1re, 30 juin 2004, which the French challenger invokes here). The latter case, however, contained an obiter dictum (interestingly characterized as such in Mme Pascal's Report) according to which anti-suit injunctions (as opposed to freezing orders) "affect the jurisdiction of foreign

courts". This dictum must however be interpreted in the light of Banque Worms, also cited by the Report , and, beyond the fact that the Stolzenberg case actually gave effect to a Mareva injunction, seems mainly to have been designed to draw the attention of the lower courts once again to the potential risks involved in enjoining foreign proceedings – but does not necessarily exclude the use of such measures when protecting choice of forum agreements, or at least, when protecting the jurisdiction of the chosen court to decide on the validity of the clause.

This latter consideration seems to have been decisive in the present case. The Report underlines, citing various scholarly opinions on this point, that in circumstances such as this, the injunction is merely designed to ensure the performance of the parties' contract (which of course includes the choice of forum clause). And, as Adrian Briggs has already pointed out, this is excellent judicial policy. The recognition of the American judgment here means that the French courts seized in apparent violation of the clause have refrained from ruling on its validity, in favour of the decision of the chosen court on this point. True, one might wonder why the detour via the enforcement of the American injunction was necessary: did it not suffice that the French court, whose jurisdiction was challenged on the basis of the choice of forum agreement, decline to exercise such jurisdiction, at least pending the decision of the American court? The explanation appears to be that the American judgment was presented very quickly with a view to obtain an exequatur, and, on appeal, the Court of Versailles had not yet had the opportunity to hear the appeal on the jurisdictional issue. If one takes the sole issue of jurisdiction, it might of course have made more practical sense for the Court to stay the exequatur proceedings until it had decided on the (lack of) jurisdiction of the French courts under the choice of forum clause (or at least, ruled on the basis of Kompetenz-Kompetenz). But since the American judgment appears to have contained both the injunction and a decision on the merits, allowing enforcement meant that the jurisdictional issue and the issue of the French distributor's debt were on fact resolved in one fell swoop. Of course, as Raphael points out, enforcing the injunction may mean that the Cour de cassation is ready to go further than English courts, which stop short of enforcing foreign judicial orders which are not purely monetary. However, this point needs to be clarified in future cases, since the injunction came as a package with the judgment on the merits.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Cour de cassation's decision, here again enlightened by the report, concerns its reading of the implications of West Tankers. The report clearly opines that while the Cour de cassation is now bound not to allow recognition of, say, an English anti-suit injunction when the enjoined proceedings are in France (or indeed before an arbitrator in France) , it remains free to recognize injunctions issued by the courts of third states. This of course is where things become sticky. Of course, the choice of forum agreement concerns the court of a third state and is as such apparently outside the bounds of the Brussels Regulation. But then, of course, so were the arbitration proceedings in West Tankers. In that case, the fact that the party in apparent breach of the arbitration clause had seized the court of a Member State (with jurisdiction under the Regulation? this requirement is no doubt superfluous) was enough to prohibit the use of the injunction by the English courts, under the "effet utile" and mutual trust doctrines. Do the latter apply here? Could such principles prevent the court of a Member State from declining its own jurisdiction in favour of the courts of a third state? Surely not? But this very question shows that the problem may well not lie in the anti-suit aspect of things at all, but in Owusu and its (unclear) implications as to the scope of the Regulation as far as choice of law agreements in favour of the courts of third states are concerned, when the defendant is domiciled in a Member State. Does it really make any difference here where the French court declines jurisdiction on the basis of a choice of forum agreement (either because it says it is valid under principles of common French private international law or because it decides to apply the Kompentez-Kompetenz principle in favour of the chosen court's jurisdiction to rule on its own jurisdiction under the agreement) or because it decides to recognise an American anti-suit injunction? For the moment, as the Cour de cassation's decision shows (cf Konkola Mines), national courts are resisting the expansion of the Regulation into the relationship between a Member state and a third state, as far as choice of law agreements are concerned. But current work in progress within the European institutions and study groups is now envisaging this relationship, which may make a case for the ratification of the 2005 Hague Convention. In the meantime, if priority was recognised to the (presumptively) chosen forum to rule on its own jurisdiction, whether it be a court or an arbitrator, or in a Member State or not, life would no doubt be a little simpler.

[1] "Judicial (Self-)Portraits: Judicial Discourse in the French Legal System," 104 *Yale Law Journal* 1325-410 (1995).

[2] It is also important, of course, not to underestimate the procedural constraints which weigh on the Cour de cassation (and which are high-lighted by the report when it discusses the legal arguments raised by the parties), which is bound by the way in which the legal issue is framed before it (by virtue of what is known here as the “linguistic police” of the judiciary), and whose decisions may not have the same significance according to whether the Court quashes the decision of the lower court or merely dismisses the “pourvoi”.