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Reconsidering Disclosure and Liability in the Transatlantic Capital Markets

Mark K. Brewer, Orla Gough, & Neeta S. Shah*

The history of global finance since 1980 has . . . been one of frighteningly expensive financial crises—expensive not just in terms of the costs to the taxpayer or of output foregone, but in terms of the shattered lives of innocent victims.¹

I. INTRODUCTION

In response to the global recession, governments around the world are introducing financial regulation reforms and pledging increased global coordination of regulatory efforts. While these reforms will introduce some of the most significant changes to financial regulation since the Great Depression, they fail to fundamentally alter the current overreliance on disclosure and fail to achieve international cooperation in deterring the next financial crisis. This article aims to explore some of the limits of disclosure as a basis for financial regulation and suggests that international regulatory coordination of liability standards can help curtail the risky behavior that often leads to the pattern of boom and bust in the global financial markets. The purpose of this article is to evaluate previous research challenging the assumption that disclosure of information forms a sufficient basis for regulating securities, as well as to call for more rigorous enforcement of existing laws and cooperation on standards of liability by regulators in the United States ("U.S.") and the European Union ("EU").

The U.S. and the United Kingdom (U.K.), along with the other member states of the EU, have explored a number of measures to deter future financial crises. Such cooperation builds upon previous commitments to cooperate on financial regulation. Following the wave of corporate scandals in the early 2000s, including those involv-

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ing Enron, WorldCom and Parmalat, the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA)\(^2\) and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)\(^3\) have pledged to pursue convergence of norms, standards, and regulations in the transatlantic capital markets to achieve the creation of a barrier-free market.\(^4\) A true transatlantic market in securities,\(^5\) supervised by regulators on both sides of the Atlantic\(^6\) as well as by other marketplace actors, could greatly enhance efficiency.\(^7\) However, in addition to working toward convergence in national disclosure standards (which currently form the basis of securities regulation in both the U.S. and the EU),\(^8\) cooperation on enforcement and levels of liability for wrongdoing could greatly enhance investor protection. In particular, governments should agree on common liability standards which can disincentivize overly risky behavior.

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2. ESMA is an independent EU Authority that attempts to maintain the stability of the European market and enhance investor protection. See European Securities and Markets Authority, Frequently Asked Questions: A Guide to Understanding ESMA 3 (2011), available at http://www.esma.europa.eu/popup2.php?id=7366. In contrast to the SEC, ESMA does not have enforcement powers over securities issuers, but it can issue recommendations. Id. at 5.


5. The academic literature offers two means of harmonization. See Eric J. Pan, Harmonization of U.S.-EU Securities Regulation: The Case for a Single European Securities Regulator, 34 Law & Pol'y Int'l Bus. 499, 504 (2003). First, the EU and the U.S. could pursue harmonization by implementing mandatory rules applicable to all issuers. Id. Second, regulatory competition in which both the EU and the U.S. permit issuers to select the regime which is most efficacious could also achieve harmonization. Id. at 504-05 citing, inter alia, Roberta Romano, Empowering Investors: A Market Approach to Securities Regulation, 107 Yale L.J. 2359 (1998); Stephen J. Choi & Andrew T. Guzman, Portable Reciprocity: Rethinking the International Reach of Securities Regulation, 71 S. Cal. L. Rev. 903 (1998); and Stephen Choi, Regulating Investors Not Issuers: A Market-Based Proposal, 88 Calif. L. Rev. 279 (2000).

6. Experts have even called for a single European regulator to act in conjunction with the SEC. See generally Pan, supra note 5, at 534-35. Currently, the regulators in Europe are national, including, among others, the Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (Bundesanstalt für Finanzdienstleistungsauftuskht (BaFin)) in Germany and the Financial Services Authority (FSA) in the United Kingdom.


8. Iris H-Y Chiu, Delegated Regulatory Administration in Mandatory Disclosure—Some Observations from EU Securities Regulation, 40 Int'l Law. 737, 739 (2006) (noting that "[t]he mandatory disclosure regulation for public offers is a foundational form of securities regulation, whether in the United States or in the EU.").
Part II of this Article will briefly survey the current financial regulatory environment in the U.S. and in the EU, with an emphasis on the U.K. Part III will summarize the weaknesses of disclosure as the basis of a securities regulation regime. Finally, this article will survey international efforts to regulate securities as well as make proposals to extend cooperation from the formulation of international disclosure standards to the setting of liability standards as well as enforcement of such standards by national regulators.

II. CURRENT FINANCIAL REGULATION IN THE U.S. AND EU

A. United States

In the United States, the SEC has the authority to regulate the securities markets, and both federal and state laws form the legal framework for regulating the sale of securities. In the aftermath of the Great Depression, the United States adopted a securities regulations system based on mandatory disclosure and registration. The system has been summarized as follows:

The logic is that by arming investors with information, mandatory disclosure promotes informed investor decision making, capital market integrity, and capital market efficiency. Once they are empowered with information, the argument goes, investors can protect themselves against corporate abuses and mismanagement, and there is no need for the government to engage in more substantive securities regulation — merit review in the parlance.

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9. See infra notes 12-178 and accompanying text.
10. See infra notes 183-225 and accompanying text.
11. See infra notes 226-65 and accompanying text.
13. State laws are called “blue sky laws.” See generally Harold S. Bloomenthal & Samuel Wolff, Securities and Federal Corporate Law, part XI, § 26.1 (2d ed. 2004). The term “blue sky” denotes the purpose of state securities laws: they are designed to prevent “speculative schemes which have no more basis than so many feet of blue sky.” Id. (quoting Hall v. Geiger-Jones Co., 242 U.S. 539, 550 (1917)).
This disclosure-based regime is built on the premise that providing investors with all material information will lead to the most rational investment decisions and in the long-run, the highest levels of efficiency in the capital markets.\textsuperscript{17}

Financial regulation has depended on whether a particular instrument constitutes a “security” in which case regulation falls within the SEC’s regulatory authority.\textsuperscript{18} Financial instruments which do not fall within the concept of a security are supervised by other regulators, most notably the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), which has had some authority for regulating derivatives. The regulation of banking activities is not within the authority granted to either the SEC or the CFTC, and as such falls outside the scope of this article.\textsuperscript{19} Widespread disagreement on how to classify credit derivatives\textsuperscript{20} - the instruments which lay at the heart of the subprime mortgage crisis - has caused difficulty in assigning regulatory responsibility for regulating such financial instruments.\textsuperscript{21} In the wake of the subprime mortgage crisis, efforts are under way to clearly assign joint responsibility to the CFTC and the SEC to regulate derivative financial instruments.\textsuperscript{22} The lack of regulatory supervision for derivative instruments illustrates the damaging consequences of financial innovation that is not suitably regulated. The U.S.’s rule-based system\textsuperscript{23} applies not only to U.S. companies but also extraterritorially to non-U.S. issuers.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} See generally LOSS & SELIGMAN, supra note 12, at 201-77 (discussing the statutory definition and judicial interpretation of the term “security”).
\item \textsuperscript{19} For an analysis of the tension between the regulatory authority of the SEC and U.S. banking regulators, see Eugene F. Maloney, Banks and the SEC: A Regulatory Mismatch, 25 ANN. REV. BANKING & FIN. L. 443 (2006) (arguing that the SEC and banking regulators should work together to improve the oversight of banking securities activities and enhance investor protection).
\item \textsuperscript{20} See generally Lily Tijoe, Credit Derivatives: Regulatory Challenges in an Exploding Industry, 26 ANN. REV. BANKING & FIN. L. 387 (2007) (discussing the problems associated with assigning responsibility for regulating derivatives).
\item \textsuperscript{21} Colleen M. Baker, Regulating the Invisible: The Case of Over-the-Counter Derivatives, 85 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1317 (2010).
\item \textsuperscript{22} Id. at 1336-38.
\end{itemize}
Several federal statutes form the basic regulatory framework, including the Securities Act of 1933 (the "Securities Act"),\textsuperscript{25} the Exchange Act of 1934 (the "Exchange Act"),\textsuperscript{26} the Trust Indenture Act of 1939,\textsuperscript{27} the Investment Company Act of 1940,\textsuperscript{28} the Investment Advisers Act of 1940,\textsuperscript{29} the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002,\textsuperscript{30} and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010 (the "Dodd-Frank Act").\textsuperscript{31} Due to the wide scope of these laws, this Article focuses only on the Securities Act, the Exchange Act, Sarbanes-Oxley, and the Dodd-Frank Act.\textsuperscript{32}

1. Securities Act

The Securities Act regulates the initial distribution of securities by an issuer.\textsuperscript{33} With certain limited exceptions,\textsuperscript{34} § 5 of the Securities Act makes it illegal for any person to offer to sell or buy any security unless the security is registered with the SEC.\textsuperscript{35} The SEC regulates the sale of securities through requiring issuers to disclose certain informa-

\textsuperscript{25} 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 77a-77aa (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
\textsuperscript{26} 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 78a-77jj (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
\textsuperscript{27} 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 77aaa-77bbb (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
\textsuperscript{28} 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 80a-1 to 80a-64 (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
\textsuperscript{29} 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 80b- to 80-b21 (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
\textsuperscript{32} The statutes not included herein regulate interstate holding companies concerned with trust indentures which publicly issue more than $5 million worth of debt securities, Trust Indenture Act of 1939, 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 77aaa-77bbb (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)); companies which either have the primary purpose of investing securities or holding, trading, investing, reinvesting, or owning certain securities which account for more than forty percent of the value of their assets, Investment Company Act of 1940 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 80a-1 to 80a-64 (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)); and investment advisers who give advice on securities if not incidental to a brokerage business, Investment Advisers Act of 1940, 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 80b- to 80-b21 (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
\textsuperscript{33} See generally LOSS & SELIGMAN, supra note 12, at 38.
\textsuperscript{34} Exemptions exist for certain transactions and particular types of securities. The most common transaction exemptions include 15 U.S.C.A. § 77(c)(11) (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)), which allows intrastate offers and sales only; § 77(d), which allows for private placements, i.e., where no public offer is made; § 77(c)(b), which allows for offerings of no more than $5 million; and Regulation S which allows for offers and sales outside the United States. Securities issued or guaranteed to by federal, state or municipal governments are exempt as well those issued by not-for profit organizations, those maturing in less than nine months, those which are part of a reorganization plan under bankruptcy and those which are exchanged for no associated commission pursuant to an exchange exclusively with existing holders by the issuer are all exempt according to § 77(c)(a)(10).
\textsuperscript{35} 15 U.S.C.A. § 77e (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
tion, rather than examining the offer itself or "substantively regulating corporate behavior." Depending on the type of issuer, or transaction, the securities laws require different registration forms and levels of disclosure. Regardless of the issuer or transaction, however, the issuer must describe its financial condition and operating results, as well as other matters related to its business. Since 1998, the SEC has enforced a "Plain English" rule that requires financial reports and offering documents to be written in a manner that is clear, precise and accessible to investors.

If the registration statement contains any material misstatement of fact or material omission, the purchaser has a cause of action against the issuer and its directors, the underwriters of the offering, each person who signed the registration statement, and each expert (which includes accountants and appraisers) who prepared and consented to be named in the registration statement. Such liability provisions are severe and are designed to convey all relevant details to the markets and investors. However, as will be shown in Part III, such a disclosure-based approach is not necessarily effective in deterring the type of behavior that led to the financial crises of the past and that are likely to lead to potential crises in the future.

2. Exchange Act

The Exchange Act regulates securities traded in the secondary market after initial distribution. Under the Exchange Act, issuers with securities that are either listed on a U.S. national exchange or have

38. See generally Loss & Seligman, supra note 12, at 139. The SEC requires different levels of disclosure based on whether the issuer is a U.S. or non-U.S. issuer. Id.
39. In particular, each registration statement requires a management discussion and analysis section. See generally Greene et al., supra note 36, § 2-218.
41. For further details on the contents of registration statements, see Loss & Seligman, supra note 12, at 138-44.
43. Loss & Seligman, supra note 12, at 1152. Several statutory provisions grant remedies for misleading or fraudulent disclosures, including 15 U.S.C.A. §§ 77h, 77k, 77l(a)(2) and 77q (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)). See generally Greene et al., supra note 36, § 15.03.
44. See infra notes 183-225 and accompanying text.
45. See generally Loss & Seligman, supra note 12, at 435.
500 or more shareholders of any class of equity securities and greater than $10 million in assets must file periodic reports\textsuperscript{46} with the SEC.\textsuperscript{47} In addition, issuers who engage in the public offering of debt or equity securities in the U.S. are required to file periodic reports.\textsuperscript{48} Recognized as the primary remedy for violations,\textsuperscript{49} § 10(b) of the Exchange Act prohibits the use of any manipulative or deceptive device in interstate commerce in the sale or purchase of a security.\textsuperscript{50} Promulgated pursuant to § 10(b) of the Exchange Act, Rule 10b-5 makes it unlawful to use any direct or indirect means of interstate commerce or to employ any deceptive or manipulative device, or make any material untrue statement or material omission in connection with the purchase or sale of any security.\textsuperscript{51}

3. Sarbanes-Oxley Act

Following Enron’s spectacular financial meltdown\textsuperscript{52} and the litany of other financial scandals that rocked markets around the world at the dawn of the twenty-first century,\textsuperscript{53} the U.S. Congress engaged in a feverish attempt\textsuperscript{54} to put into place new legal structures to increase investor protection.\textsuperscript{55} The Congressional reform efforts culminated in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{46} For its annual report, quarterly report and current report (for any material event or corporate change), a domestic issuer must file a Form 10-K, Form 10-Q and a Form 8-K, respectively, while a foreign issuer must file a Form 20-F, which is effective for both the Securities Act and the Exchange Act, and a Form 8-A is used if the issuer is registering under the Exchange Act in a public offer. See Greene et al., supra note 36, § 3.03[1].
\item \textsuperscript{47} See Greene et al., supra note 36, § 1.03.
\item \textsuperscript{48} See generally Greene et al., supra note 36, § 1.03.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Greene et al., supra note 36, § 15.03.
\item \textsuperscript{50} See generally Loss and Seligman, supra note 12, at 839-40.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Roberta Romano, The Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the Making of Quack Corporate Governance, 114 Yale L.J. 1521, 1523-24 (2005).
\item \textsuperscript{55} See Shirinyan, supra note 15, at 524.
\end{itemize}
the adoption of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act56 ("SOX") in the summer of 2002. SOX is a far-reaching statute,57 which imposes significant new corporate governance, certification, disclosure and other requirements that directly impact U.S. and non-U.S.58 companies with securities listed on national securities exchanges in the U.S. (e.g., the New York Stock Exchange ("NYSE") and NASDAQ59).

SOX is the most significant statute relating to securities regulation over the past several decades.60 It created a significant regulatory regime for accountants including independence, certification, and attestation requirements, as well as requiring the establishment of an accounting oversight board called the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (the "PCAOB").61 Furthermore, Title III of SOX sets forth standards of corporate responsibility, including independence standards for audit committees.62 The increased disclosure63 and costs64 associated with SOX have caused much reluctance and opposition from foreign private issuers65 in particular.66 Many experts have harshly criticized Sarbanes-Oxley,67 arguing that "the corporate governance provisions in SOX are ill conceived."68 Although SOX imposes significant costs69 on all registered companies and disproportionately affects foreign issuers,70 the additional layers of pro-

58. For foreign issuers in particular, SOX has resulted in significant direct and indirect costs to issuers as well as to their advisers and the exchanges upon which they list. See Shirinyan, supra note 15, at 525. See also Naidu, supra note 24, at 277.
59. See generally NASDAQ Stock Market - Stock Quotes - Stock Exchange News - NASDAQ, http://www.nasdaq.com (last visited Jan 21, 2011). Operated under the supervision of the National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD), the NASDAQ Stock Market ("NASDAQ") is the securities market formerly operating under the name the "National Association Securities Dealers Automated Quotation System." Securities are quoted on NASDAQ (rather than listed).
60. Gara & Langstraat, supra note 57, at 74.
66. The SEC received a number of comment letters regarding SOX's impact on foreign issuers. See generally Letter from Todd M. Malan to Jonathan G. Katz (Aug. 19, 2002), available at http://www.sec.gov/rules/proposed/s72102/tmmalan1.htm (discussing the extremely high level of liability SOX § 304 could impose on officers of foreign private issuers); Letter from Alexander...
tection offered by SOX cannot ensure ethical behavior,71 and history indicates that unethical companies simply will become more creative in thwarting new regulations.72

4. Dodd-Frank Act

On July 21, 2010, President Obama signed the Dodd-Frank Act,73 which contains wide provisions for regulating the financial markets. Among other changes, the Dodd-Frank Act establishes the Financial Stability Oversight Council, whose purpose is to identify risks to U.S. financial stability, promote marketplace discipline, and respond to threats to financial stability.74 In response to criticisms against companies considered “too big to fail,” the Act creates a mechanism through an “orderly liquidation authority” that allows the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to take control over financial institutions whose collapse might threaten the entire U.S. economy.75 The Act also introduces new regulatory measures related to the hedge fund and private equity industries as well as adjusts the standards for an “accredited investor.”76 In addition to creating the Federal Insurance Office within the Department of the Treasury to monitor most lines of insurance,77 the Act also introduces stricter regulation, oversight, and enforcement powers over depository institutions and their subsidiaries.78 Further, the Dodd-Frank Act assigns primary regulatory responsibility to the CFTC and the SEC to regulate the swaps market.
and other aspects of the derivative industry.79 The Act also increases regulation of financial market utilities and institutions engaged in payment, clearing, and settlement activities80 as well as enhancing regulatory requirements relating to broker-dealers, credit rating agencies, structured finance products, executive compensation and corporate governance.81 The Act also introduces changes at the Federal Reserve, including limiting its authority to engage in emergency lending,82 and it creates of the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection to issue rules applicable to financial institutions that offer financial products and services to consumers.83 Additionally, the Act enables the Secretary of the Treasury to establish programs aimed at improving underserved communities’ access to financial products84 and contains amendments to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which was passed in response to the financial crisis precipitated by the failure of the subprime loan industry.85 Finally, among its other provisions, the Act increases disclosure obligation requirements relating to residential mortgage loans.86

5. Other Regulators

The U.S. Congress created the CFTC in 1974 to regulate commodity futures and option markets in the United States.87 Although its original mandate largely concerned the agricultural sector, a series of legislative actions, most notably the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000 and most recently the Dodd-Frank Act, has increased its regulatory authority significantly.88 The CFTC works to encourage competitiveness and efficiency in the futures markets, to help protect market participants from manipulation, fraud, and abusive trading practices, and to ensure the financial integrity of clearing processes.89

Self-regulatory organizations (“SROs”) have an important role in monitoring the capital markets in the United States. These non-governmental entities, including the NYSE and the National Association

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79. See id. tit. 7 (Wall Street Transparency and Accountability).
80. See id. tit. 8 (Payment, Clearing, and Settlement Supervision).
81. See id. tit. 9 (Investor Protections and Improvements to the Regulation of Securities).
82. See id. tit. 11 (Federal Reserve System Provisions).
84. See id. tit. 12 (Improving Access to Mainstream Financial Institutions).
85. See id. tit. 13 (Pay It Back Act).
86. See id. tit. 14 (Mortgage Reform and Anti-Predatory Lending Act).
88. Id.
89. See id.
of Securities Dealers, Inc. ("NASD"), work in concert with the SEC and act with quasi-governmental authority to adopt rules for the enforcement of federal securities laws.90

6. Enforcement and Liability

Enforcement of securities laws in the U.S. is largely posited on mandatory disclosure and antifraud rules. Sections 77k, 77l(a)(2), and 77q(a) of the Securities Act all allow for liability for failure to disclose all material facts.91 These and other similar provisions "are designed to work hand-in-hand to protect investors and promote market integrity."92 In addition, § 78j of the Exchange Act,93 as well as Rule 10b-5, further provide for liability for failures to disclose all material facts.94 The United States Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995 was designed to offer protection against frivolous lawsuits.95 The so-called fraud-on-the-market theory has been the general presumption in U.S. securities litigation since the Supreme Court’s decision in Basic Inc. v. Levinson, which guides shareholder class action suits in the U.S. and is posited on the efficient market hypothesis, which broadly assumes that stock values always reflect all relevant information and therefore trading prices on exchanges reflect the stock’s actual value.96 A plaintiff may also rely on the common law theory of deceit, although this is more difficult to prove in practice.97

90. See generally Ernest E. Badway & Jonathan M. Busch, Ending Securities Industry Self-Regulation As We Know It, 57 RUTGERS L. REV. 1351, 1352-56 (2005).
91. In TSC Indus., Inc. v. Northway, Inc., 426 U.S. 438 (1976), the U.S. Supreme Court addressed the meaning of the term “material” in the following manner: “An omitted fact is material if there is a substantial likelihood that a reasonable shareholder would consider it important in deciding how to vote.” Id. at 449.
93. 15 U.S.C.A. § 78j (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
97. See Frederick C. Dunbar & Dana Heller, Fraud on the Market Meets Behavioral Finance, 31 DEL. J. CORP. L. 455, 458 (2006). In describing the requirements to prove deceit in reliance on Greenwald v. Integrated Energy, 103 F.R.D. 65, 68 (S.D. Tex. 1984), the authors note that it requires "among other things, the following: (1) materiality – whether the misstatement or omission was important to a reasonable investor; (2) scienter – whether defendants acted with some degree of intent; (3) reliance – whether the investor’s decision to trade was affected by the omission or misstatement (also sometimes called transaction causation); and (4) loss causation – whether the misstatement or omission was the proximate cause of the loss to the investor." Frederick C. Dunbar & Dana Heller, Fraud on the Market Meets Behavioral Finance, 31 DEL. J. CORP. L. 455, 458 (2006).
The SEC's Division of Enforcement has the authority to investigate alleged securities violations, and it may bring an action in federal court or through an administrative proceeding.98 While the SEC's statutory purpose is to deter violations and provide remedial relief to aggrieved investors, its enforcement actions have become punitive over the past two decades.99 The regulatory measures and penalties available to the SEC are significant, including an injunction prohibiting the improper conduct, disgorgement of ill-gotten gains, civil monetary penalties, a prohibition against a person serving as an officer or director in a public company, and suspension from practice before the SEC.100 However, the SEC has no authority to bring a criminal case against a defendant, but it may recommend that the Department of Justice prosecute a defendant in a criminal proceeding.101 Although the U.S. Supreme Court has not determined whether the provision provides a private cause of action,102 the provision grants the SEC significant power to pursue wrongdoing.

B. The European Union and the United Kingdom

In the context of creating a true internal market, the EU seeks to eliminate all barriers to the free movement of goods, services, people, and capital among the EU member states according to the terms of the Treaties forming the European Union.103 The EU has worked toward further integration with the adoption of the Euro as the common currency among many of its member states, the establishment of the European Central Bank, and the introduction of European citizenship. Nonetheless, the patchwork of securities regulations in Europe


99. Paul S. Atkins & Bradley J. Bondi, Evaluating the Mission: A Critical Review of the History and Evolution of the SEC Enforcement Program, 13 FORDHAM J. CORP. & FIN. L. 367, 383 (2008). The authors point out that through Congressional legislation, "the SEC gained three significant new sets of powers: (1) the ability to seek civil monetary penalties against persons and entities that may have violated federal securities laws; (2) the authority to bar directors and officers of public companies from serving in those capacities if they violated federal antifraud provisions; and (3) the authority to issue administrative cease-and-desist orders, temporary restraining orders, and orders for disgorgement of ill-gotten profits to violators of federal securities laws." Id. at 385.

100. Id.


"lacks any sort of legal uniformity in terms of laws." In an attempt to identify measures for promoting harmonization among the member states, the EU Economic and Finance Ministers appointed the Committee of Wise Men to investigate the regulation of the securities market in the EU. The culmination of the Committee of Wise Men's work was the recommendation for the creation of the European Securities Committee (the "ESC") and the Committee of European Securities Regulators ("CESR").

Although the U.K. Government has planned fundamental reforms to financial regulation, the principles which have underpinned the regulatory framework in the U.K. since the late 1990s continue to be relevant. These principles have focused on the avoidance of duplication between the roles assigned to the each of the Tri-partite Authorities (Financial Services Authority, Bank of England and Treasury); on achieving clarity of responsibility and of decision making; and on adequate structural flexibility to respond to an increasingly complex, global, and integrated financial services market place. The principles which inform the practice of regulation are a risk-based approach, based on a balance between general principles and specific rules. The following discussion sketches the regulatory framework in the EU, focusing on the U.K. in particular.

1. European Union

In order to achieve a greater degree of financial markets integration, the European Commission issued a plan in 1999 to further and more effectively harmonize EU securities laws with the Financial Services Action Plan ("FSAP"), which the Lisbon European Council


106. See id. at 28. The ESC is comprised of representatives from the member states while CESR is comprised of senior representatives from the member states' securities regulators.


endorsed in March 2000 to create the necessary regulatory environment to help achieve the integration of financial markets in the EU by 2005. The FSAP was implemented through a number of legislative measures regulating or de-regulating financial services, securities markets, and corporate governance. A number of European directives form the securities regulatory framework, including the Prospectus Directive, the Takeover Directive, the Transparency Directive, the Market Abuse Directive, and the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive.

a. Prospectus Directive

As part of its effort to create a true pan-European securities regime and enhance consumer protection, the European Commission adopted the Prospectus Directive in December 2003, and the implementation of the directive in the national laws or regulations was to occur no later than July 1, 2005. The Directive specifies the disclosure requirements relating to initial information for securities offered...
publicly or admitted to trading on a EU regulated market. As the Prospectus Directive is a "maximum harmonization" directive, the member states are not able to impose additional requirements regarding the content of a prospectus or the circumstances requiring a prospectus on issuers from other member states. The importance of the Prospectus Directive is that it provides a single platform for issuers to raise capital in the EU, and has created a far more harmonized European regime across the member states.

b. Takeover Directive

The Takeover Directive establishes a common EU framework to regulate takeover bids of companies whose securities trade on EU regulated markets. The Directive is modelled closely on the U.K. Takeover Code, which is strongly weighted toward protecting the shareholders' interests. However, member states have implemented the Takeover Directive in different manners. These various national approaches have hindered the development of a transparent and stable cross-border restructuring environment.

c. Transparency Directive

The Transparency Directive covers the content and regularity with which companies should report financial information, and ensures that such information is appropriately disseminated to the market. The Transparency Directive requires member states to take measures to

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120. See CESR, CESR's REPORT ON THE SUPERVISORY FUNCTIONING OF THE PROSPECTUS DIRECTIVE AND REGULATION 5 (June 2007); Edward F. Greene, Resolving Regulatory Conflicts Between the Capital Markets of the United States and Europe, 2 CAPITAL MARKETS L.J. 5, 16 (2007).


comply with the directive by January 20, 2007. In contrast to the Prospectus Directive, the Transparency Directive is not a "maximum harmonization" directive; therefore, the member states are able to impose additional requirements on issuers incorporated in their respective countries. The Transparency Directive requires issuers of debt or equity securities traded on a stock market or other regulated market in the EU to publish within four months of the end of the financial year, file with the appropriate authority with the issuer's home member state, and make publicly available in the EU an audited financial statement under the International Financial Reporting Standards or its equivalent, and a management report and statements made by the persons responsible within the issuer. Similarly, the Transparency Directive requires companies to issue half-year reports using international accounting standards within two months of the issuer's financial half-year, and be accompanied by a management report and statements made by the persons responsible within the issuer. Irrespective of whether the issuers report quarterly because they are required to by their national legislation or by the rules of the regulated market or by its own initiative, they are required to make an interim statement explaining material events and transactions that occurred during the period and its impact on the financial position of the issuer and a general description of its financial position and performance. The Transparency Directive further requires the disclosure of significant changes in securities holdings as measured by voting rights beginning with five percent and thereafter at each five percent interval to thirty percent, then at fifty percent and finally at seventy-five percent.

d. Market Abuse Directive

Effective April 2003, the Market Abuse Directive sets forth regulations to address insider trading and market manipulation, affecting all firms and individuals participating in a regulated market in the EU. The primary requirements for firms are mandatory suspicious transaction reporting and preventative requirements for issuers and their ad-

126. Id. at 56.
127. Id. at 42.
128. Id. at 44-45.
129. Id. at 45.
131. Id. at 47.
visers to keep lists of staff who have inside information.\textsuperscript{133} The Market Abuse Directive requires the dissemination of inside information as soon as possible in order to avoid market abuse.\textsuperscript{134} The Market Abuse Directive adopts a uniform definition of “inside information” where information must be of a precise nature, be price sensitive, not have been made public, and related to issuer(s) of financial instruments or of related derivative financial instruments.\textsuperscript{135}

e. Markets in Financial Instruments Directive

The Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID), which came into force in April 2004, replaces the existing Investment Services Directive and regulates the authorization and conduct of securities firms and markets.\textsuperscript{136} The purpose of MiFID is to promote the cross-EU provision of investment services while protecting the investor and supporting market integrity.\textsuperscript{137}

2. \textit{United Kingdom}

a. The Financial Services Authority

The Financial Services Authority (the “FSA”) is the single statutory regulator for financial services in the UK,\textsuperscript{138} which was formed from the merger of nine sector-based regulatory bodies.\textsuperscript{139} The reasoning for an integrated financial services regulator is indicative of market developments: for example, the increase in the number of financial corporations and the blurring of boundaries between financial prod-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{133} \textit{Id.} at 22.
\item \textsuperscript{134} \textit{Id.} at 17.
\item \textsuperscript{135} \textit{Id.} at 20.
\item \textsuperscript{137} FSA, \textit{Current EU Issues in Financial Services Regulation} (2005), \textit{available at} http://www.fsa.gov.uk/pages/about/media/notes/bn011.shtml.
\item \textsuperscript{139} The previous regulatory bodies consisted of the following: The Securities and Investment Board, the Personal Investment Authority, the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, the Securities and Futures Authority, the Supervision and Surveillance Division of the Bank of England, the Building Societies Commission, the Insurance Directorate of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Friendly Societies Commission and, the Registrar of Friendly Societies.
\end{itemize}
ucts which make sector-based regulation less viable. The Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") importantly sets out the role of each principal authority of the tripartite oversight framework for financial stability, a responsibility collectively shared between the Bank of England, the FSA and the Treasury. The MOU includes a revised description of the role and function of each of the three groups. The Bank of England is to continue to add to the maintenance of the stability of the financial system as a whole based on its macro-economic and financial analysis and its operational involvement in the markets, payment systems, and market infrastructure. The FSA has responsibilities for the authorization and supervision of financial institutions, supervision of financial markets, securities clearing and settlement systems, and for relevant regulatory policy. The Treasury is responsible for the overall institutional structure of regulation and the legislation governing it, including the negotiations of EC directives.

It has been argued that the UK's principle-based approach has been seen as an attractive model compared to more stringent regulatory requirements.

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 sets out four statutory regulatory objectives and several regulatory principles, including maintaining market confidence in the financial system, promoting public awareness of the financial system, securing consumer protection, and preventing the financial sector firms from being used for a purpose connected with financial crime. In fulfilling these objectives, the FSA is guided by a number of particular considerations, including: the efficient and economic use of resources; financial services firms' management role in meeting regulatory responsibilities; the principle that a burden or restriction on regulated activity should be


142. Id.

143. Id.

144. Id.


proportionate to the benefit conferred; the facilitation of innovation in the market; and maintenance of the U.K.'s competitive position.\textsuperscript{148}

b. The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000

Consolidating the previous main legislative regimes governing the marketing of deposits, insurance, and investments,\textsuperscript{149} the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 ("FSMA") came into force on November 30, 2001, and provides a single flexible legislative framework, conferring extensive powers on the Treasury and the FSA to devise the details of the regulatory regime by secondary legislation.\textsuperscript{150} Part II of the Act sets forth the "general prohibition" such that only an authorized or an exempt person may carry on, or may purport to carry on, a regulated activity from the U.K.\textsuperscript{151} Under the FSMA, the FSA may impose disciplinary sanctions, including fines or public statements, for breaches of the Listing Rules.\textsuperscript{152}

3. The Bank of England, the Treasury, and Future Reforms

The Bank of England has an independent role in setting monetary policies. Its role exists in the area of macroeconomic stability, whereas the two microeconomic stability objectives of prudential supervision and investor protection are within the FSA's regulatory regime.\textsuperscript{153} The Treasury has reserve powers to give orders to the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank if they are required in the public interest and by extreme economic circumstances, but such orders must be endorsed by Parliament.\textsuperscript{154}

Chancellor George Osborne is convinced that the tripartite system of regulation set up in 1997, which split the control of the Bank, the Treasury, and the FSA, has been a contributory factor in the financial...
crisis problems in U.K. Since the formation of FSA in 1997 until 2010, the UK has presented a unified supervisory system with the FSA acting as a single supervisory agent, given statutory powers by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. However, the tripartite relationship of the three authorities has been highly criticised since the failure of Northern Rock in 2007. The new coalition Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government has pronounced the single regulatory model as dated. This initiative will involve the cessation of the FSA in its current form and greater power for the Bank of England with the formation of a new Financial Policy Committee within the Bank to take responsibility of the macro-prudential regulation and a new Prudential Regulatory Authority ("PRA") as a subsidiary of the Bank to take responsibility of the micro-prudential regulation. In addition, a new Consumer Protection and Markets Authority ("CPMA") will be formed with responsibility of the conduct of business and markets regulation. This supervisory and regulatory overhaul is expected to be completed in 2012 and the FSA will be split into CPMA and the PRA. A consultation will commence to consider whether to transfer responsibility for prosecuting criminal offences involving insider dealing, market abuse, and other criminal law breaches to a new Economic Crime Agency.

4. Liability and Enforcement of U.K. and EU Law

With its power to initiate financial sector regulation, the European Commission plays a fundamental role in the formulation and monitoring of financial regulation in the EU. From 1999 to 2005, the Financial Services Action plan guided the European Commission’s initiatives, and since 2005, the White Paper on Financial Services has set the

159. HM Treasury, supra note 107, at 4.
160. HM Treasury, supra note 107, at 4.
161. HM Treasury, supra note 107, at 4.
162. HM Treasury, supra note 107, at 4.
163. Written Evidence Submitted by the FSA, PARLIAMENT.UK (Sept. 27, 2010), http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmtreasy/memo/financialreg/m27.htm.
164. HM Treasury, supra note 107, at 45.
objectives, including soundly enforcing current rules, eliminating inconsistencies in regulation, and enhancing convergence among regulatory supervisors, promoting competition, and increasing the EU's influence on global capital markets. The EU's financial regulation is designed to support the single market in financial services. Named after Alexander Lamfalussy, the Lamfalussy framework endorsed by the European Council in 2001 provides a four-level approach for the adoption of EU financial regulation. The first two levels relate to the creation of regulation, with level one denoting the adoption of legislation and level two referring to technical rulemaking led by the European Commission for the implementation of level one legislation. Level three concerns the activities of the Committee of European Banking Supervisors ("CEBS"), the Committee of European Securities Regulators ("CESR"), and the Committee of European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Supervisors ("CEIOPS") to encourage supervisory convergence and best practices. Level four denotes regulatory enforcement, chiefly by national supervisory authorities, although the European Commission monitors the application of legislation while the European Court of Justice hears allegations of infringements. Because of the complicated four-level approach to financial regulation, the enforcement of liability standards for infringement of financial regulation varies across the member states of the EU.

In the U.K., shareholders can potentially sue directors both under the FSMA and the common law to recover losses caused by false or misleading disclosure in documents supporting a public offering of


Shareholders in a public company can potentially sue in their own name under U.K. securities law to recover losses caused by false or misleading corporate disclosures. Under S459 of the Companies Act 1985, the risks posed to non-executive directors are negligible due to the fact that the U.K. lacks an analogue to SEC Rule 10b-5. Theoretically, any negligent misstatements in the annual accounts and other documents disseminated by U.K. directors can be the base for a suit by investors; however, this is only successful in rare events that the information provided guides a specific purchase or sale of shares.

Directors of UK public companies can be held liable to shareholders for listing particulars that fail to include required material or that contain false or misleading disclosures. Any person who has suffered a loss due to false or misleading statements or omissions from listing particulars may be given compensation by the responsible person. However, as of 2006, no claims had been brought forward under section 90 of FMSA 2000. This claim is analogous to a U.S. claim under § 11 of the Securities Act of 1933 for a material misstatement in a prospectus.

The FSA’s supervision and enforcement powers use individual responsibility and accountability as a core feature, with senior management responsibility a fundamental feature of the regulatory regime introduced by the FSMA. Under the FSMA, authorized firms must ensure that individuals who carry out so-called “controlled functions” (certain key functions carried on in relation to regulatory activities specified in section 59 of the FSMA) obtain approval from the FSA before performing such functions. After coming under much criticism following the onset of the financial crisis, the FSA is keen to assert an overtly strong regulatory approach.

170. PAUL DAVIES, DAVIES REVIEW OF ISSUER LIABILITY: LIABILITY FOR MISSTATEMENTS TO THE MARKETS 17 (2007).
177. See Financial Services and Markets Act, 2000, c. 8, § 59 (U.K.).
III. Analysis

Both the U.S. and the EU have largely adopted disclosure as the model underpinning securities regulation.\(^ {179} \) The current regulatory approach to financial regulation has failed to deter harmful behavior that has resulted in an unprecedented loss of value to shareholders as well as enormous liabilities to taxpayers. The current financial crisis is the most severe since the Great Depression.\(^ {180} \) There has been no shortage of new ideas to reform the financial system, although current efforts have largely focused on the symptoms of the excess, such as executive pay and bonuses, calling for further disclosure and caps on incentive-based compensation.\(^ {181} \) However, disclosure-based regulatory safeguards have failed to protect investors from the risks of actors in the financial industry seeking short-term gains at the expense of the public, and an ever-growing body of research points out the weaknesses of disclosure regimes.\(^ {182} \) Without a fundamentally different approach to regulation, the current disclosure-based regulatory model offers little hope of deterring the next major crisis.

The following discussion will examine the inherent weaknesses of the current disclosure-based financial regulatory system endorsed by the U.S. and EU (with particular attention paid to the U.K.) and the challenges of transnational regulatory cooperation in financial regulation. The discussion will critically analyze the current culture of risk-taking in the financial sector, which has had a detrimental impact on the public. Thereafter, this article will suggest alternatives for modifying behavior in lieu of additional disclosure-based rules as a means to deter excessively risky behavior by financial institutions.

\(^ {179} \) See Chiu, supra note 8, at 739.

\(^ {180} \) In August 2009, the International Monetary Fund estimated the cost of the financial crisis to be approximately $11.9 trillion. See Edmund Conway, IMF puts total cost of crisis at £7.1 trillion, DAILY TELEGRAPH, Aug. 8, 2009. According to the news agency Reuters, market participants have estimated that 40-45% of the world’s wealth has been destroyed in the crisis. See Megan Davies and Walden Siew, 45 percent of world’s wealth destroyed: Blackstone CEO, REUTERS, March 10, 2009, available at http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE52966Z20090311 (last visited Oct. 2, 2010).

\(^ {181} \) The bonus system at large banks encourages individuals to seek short-term profits, which allows “members of the investment industry profit in good times but not share the losses in bad times and encourages unchecked risk taking.” See Aaron Unterman, Innovative Destruction — Structured Finance and Credit Market Reform in the Bubble Era, 5 Hastings Bus. L.J. 53, 86 (2009).

A. Weaknesses of Disclosure

A cornerstone assumption of regulatory models based on disclosure is the rationality of market participants. Accordingly, a mandatory disclosure scheme can work most effectively where investors, analysts, brokers, and other actors have access to enough information, are able to process the information sufficiently, and behave in a rational manner.\textsuperscript{183} Much of the current reliance on disclosure-based financial regulation is based on tacit acceptance of the efficient-market hypothesis,\textsuperscript{184} and assumes rationality in the financial markets and that "the independent judgments of buyers and sellers in a securities market will best determine accurate prices for securities if those buyers and sellers have adequate information."\textsuperscript{185} However, the basic assumption of rationality may actually be flawed, which raises significant concerns with respect to investor protection.

Studies in behavioral finance have "documented aspects of 'irrationality' in investors' behavior and explored the implications of these deviations from rationality on financial markets."\textsuperscript{186} The notion that investors always operate rationally is refuted by research on cognitive constraints and biases,\textsuperscript{187} as well as the cycle of the growth of bubbles in the financial markets.\textsuperscript{188} While a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this article, research has shown that decision-makers routinely suffer from "information overload" and exhibit "herd behavior" by following the actions of others rather than displaying a rational approach to decisions.\textsuperscript{189} Studies on rationality further suggest that decisions are the result of a host of factors and circumstances, and investors are often confronted with more information than they can

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{184} For a summary of the research on the efficient capital markets hypothesis, see Dunbar & Heller, supra note 97, at 462-65 (2006).
\textsuperscript{186} Dunbar & Heller, supra note 97, at 471 (2006).
\textsuperscript{189} See generally Dalley, supra note 185, at 1114-15 (reviewing and summarizing research on the ability of individuals to correctly process information).
\end{footnotesize}
actually process. With too much information to digest and too little time to process it, “information overload can result in confusion, cognitive strain, and poorer decision-making.” Additionally, the impact of financial disclosure on investors can lead to “irrational exuberance and anxiety,” and “[i]t is well-recognized that investors can suffer cognitively from ... being unable to cognitively process and understand too much information.” Therefore, “one of the most significant problems with relying on a disclosure-based system to protect securities markets and investors is the flawed assumption that investors are purely rational actors who can utilize the disclosure effectively to make optimal investment decisions.”

Whether as a result of complexity, fraud, or confusion, both analysts and investors routinely misjudge the actual value of securities. Studies by behavioral finance theorists have also demonstrated that the prices of securities are often mispriced. With respect to analysts, a growing body of research suggests that hypermotivated and super-optimistic insiders in firms may act irrationally in underestimating risks by “emphasizing positive returns as an indication of ability and downplaying trading losses as irrelevant.” Likewise, investors may exhibit “judgment biases that lead them to underestimate the risk that bad things will occur.” Furthermore, the proliferation of information in the age of the Internet where many investors rely less on experts to filter complex financial information may result in investors actually suffering from the requirements of securities regimes based on disclosure. As one expert notes, “[m]ore information alone cannot cure investors of the judgment biases that supposedly lead them to misuse the information.” Given all these contradictions to the assumptions underlying the efficient market theory, it is doubtful that disclosure in itself can adequately protect investors.

191. Ripken, supra note 37, at 160.
194. See generally Robert J. Shiller, Irrational Exuberance 179-80 (2000). So-called “noise traders” – those who purchase and sell securities based on tips, reports of the media, misinterpretation of data and other reasons that do not reflect economic fundamentals – have been shown to explain irrational changes in the price of securities. See generally Cornell & Rutten, supra note 183, at 464.
195. Ribstein, supra note 63, at 20.
196. Ribstein, supra note 63, at 22.
197. Dalley, supra note 185, at 1090.
198. Ribstein, supra note 63, at 23.
Moreover, a disclosure-based regime can allow market participants to conceal investment risks behind opaque complex financial instruments that neither sophisticated nor retail investors actually understand.199 Many experts blame the subprime mortgage crisis on the complexity in the financial markets along with a “lack of transparency” that caused even sophisticated investors to make poor investments, while “[f]inancial institutions overestimated their ability to disseminate values and comprehend risk.”200 The complexity of products in connection with the subprime mortgage industry illustrates the difficulty in relying on disclosure as a means to regulate financial instruments, especially with respect to derivative instruments which are largely unregulated.201 With respect to some collateral debt obligations (“CDO”), for example, no amount of disclosure can adequately convey associated risks since investment banks “can tweak the inputs, assumptions, and underlying assets to produce a CDO that appears to add value, even though in reality it does not.”202 Likewise, the corporate fraud crises of 2002 was perpetuated by structuring transactions which complied with disclosure obligations while companies such as Enron and WorldCom “pursued a single-minded policy of boosting the company’s stock price at all costs.”203 Accordingly, Enron was able to evade disclosure requirements with the help of “[u]niversal banks [which] orchestrated a myriad of complex transactions” that enabled Enron to conceal approximately $25 billion in debt obligations.204

Beyond the issue of complexity, financial institutions routinely exploit areas of regulatory lacunae as well as take advantage of exemptions from regulation.205 In particular, certain types of transactions such as those involving sophisticated investors and specific areas including derivatives and hedge funds are largely unregulated by either

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199. The opaqueness of such financial instruments raises ethical issues with respect to the duty of financial institutions to market instruments which the creators of such instruments do not fully understand or judge to be sound investments.

200. See Unterma, supra note 181, at 72.


202. Id. at 1044.


204. Id. at 999.

national or international rules. With respect to derivatives, in particular, the International Swaps and Derivative Association (ISDA) "has actively resisted disclosure of credit default swap documentation, insisting that this information is proprietary." Accordingly, market practices evolve with little or no guidance from financial regulators. While the Dodd-Frank Act in the U.S. grants authority to the CFTC and SEC to oversee the derivative industry, many of the key terms in the legislation are undefined. The subprime mortgage crisis that began in 2007 largely evolved from such a regulatory void, with financial institutions and other actors in the private sectors devising ever more exotic securitized instruments and off-balance sheet arrangements. To the extent that a regime of disclosure is incapable of offering adequate protection to investors, other measures to curtail unreasonably risky behavior by financial institutions could go a long way to protecting investors.

While disclosure regimes require companies and financial institutions to provide all material information, the offeror of securities has significant discretion in determining which details it deems material. Further, in the context of private placements which are effected pursuant to exemptions from disclosure requirements, it is unclear as to how the stakeholders in the purchasing entities are protected from overly risky investment decisions. Since many complex financial instruments are issued via private placements, a regime of disclosure will not adequately protect investors. Investors in residential mortgage-backed securities ("RMBS"), the instruments that played a key role in the subprime mortgage crisis, "had very limited

206. See generally Unterman, supra note 181.
208. Partnoy & Skeel, supra note 201, at 1036.
209. Indeed, the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that certain transactions involving sophisticated investors do not require the protection afforded by the federal securities laws as they are able to "fend for themselves." SEC v. Ralston Purina Co., 346 U.S. 119, 125 (1953).
213. The market for private placements is significant. In terms of equity offers alone, $162 billion was raised via Rule 144A equity offerings, which was more than the combined capital raised in IPOs on the New York Stock Exchange, NASDAQ and the American Stock Exchange in 2006. See William K. Sjostrom, Jr., The Birth of Rule 144A Equity Offerings, 56 UCLA L. REV. 409, 412 (2008).
opportunit[y] to perform their own due diligence" and instead relied on the underwriters from which they purchased the RMBS, who "frequently cut costs and boosted profits by doing minimal due diligence of their own." The justification is that investors in private placements meet certain tests relating to size and financial sophistication. Yet, these investors manage the holdings of smaller and less sophisticated investors, the very individuals the securities laws were designed to protect. For example, ten times as much equity was raised by foreign companies in the private U.S. markets than in the public U.S. markets in 2005. In the context of derivatives, not only is information on the instruments opaque, but the manner in which instruments are structured can make it difficult, if not impossible, to assess the associated risks.

Most regulators have detailed requirements for disclosure. In the U.S., the SEC specifies particular items in its various forms, and the EU Prospectus Directive contains similar corresponding disclosure requirements. Nonetheless, these requirements do not necessarily capture the dynamic processes and personalities that lead to decisions in the boardroom since "information a firm's managers use to understand a company's operations varies from manager to manager and from company to company." Much of the information companies disclose in periodic reports and offering documents is only included if management deems it "material." For example, decisions to include personal details under gap-filling and antifraud rules relating to non-corporate information are particularly sensitive, and "materiality determinations are perhaps the most tricky." With respect to the

214. Wilmarth, supra note 203, at 1026.
215. Wilmarth, supra note 203, at 1026.
217. See generally Partnoy & Skeel, supra note 201, at 1036.
220. See Greene et al., supra note 36, at § 3.03[1].
221. Heminway, supra note 92, at 766. Heminway points out that: executives must make these decisions in what may be highly stressful or emotionally charged situations (e.g., under threat of criminal prosecution or civil enforcement, in the wake of a medical diagnosis of a serious or terminal illness, at a time of financial strife, or during the course of a divorce or nonpublic marital affair) [and] . . . decision making in times of stress, especially on matters involving a high level of sophistication and focus, has a low probability of being accurate, rational or optimal.
EU in particular, the creation of a single market lacks a consistent set of rules to establish an efficient single market for securities. The diversity caused by the various national rules and regulations can lead to competitive distortions among the financial institutions and encourage regulatory arbitrage.\textsuperscript{222}

For the reasons discussed above, the current regulatory approach based on disclosure has proved to have significant defects in terms of protecting investors. The complexity of disclosure in public offerings raises questions as to whether any level of disclosure can adequately convey the risks of certain financial instruments\textsuperscript{223} and it is doubtful that disclosure is even capable of conveying useful information in certain contexts. In his analysis of disclosure, Professor Steven Schwarcz has pointed out that certain transactions are so complicated that “few if any investors will actually understand the detailed disclosure.”\textsuperscript{224} In fact, disclosure requirements can actually be counterproductive, as they “may produce a wealth of complicated but ultimately unimportant information.”\textsuperscript{225} Both the regulatory systems of the U.S. and the EU face severe challenges in protecting investors and the financial markets under the current disclosure-based systems.

B. Alternatives to Disclosure: International Regulatory Cooperation to Deter Overly Risky Behavior

Beyond the inherent flaws of disclosure, the interconnectedness of the financial system and the widespread impact gaps in national regulation can have in the global economy necessitate a new approach to discouraging risky behavior. The patchwork of national financial regulators that constitute the current “national approach to securities regulation” allows for “large gaps between domestic regimes which provide ample opportunity for firms to adopt marginal practices in pursuit of profits.”\textsuperscript{226} Additionally, efforts to implement reforms that focus on more substantive issues can become overly complicated and lead to increased costs without clear benefits.\textsuperscript{227} Given the inherent

\textit{Id.} at 767.


\textsuperscript{223} See generally Unterman, \textit{supra} note 181.


\textsuperscript{227} Many scholars have sharply criticized the Sarbanes-Oxley Act for precisely these reasons. In his analysis of the legislative response to the corporate scandals of the early 2000s that led to
weaknesses of disclosure, as well as the financial ingenuity that is usually one step ahead of regulators, other methods of influencing behavior are necessary to prevent overly risky behavior that damages the public good. According to one expert, "it is also clear that far too many members of the industry behaved extremely recklessly and greater mechanisms of deterrence could have prevented at least some of the pain being felt now." Investors can be also be misled during times of economic expansion, underestimating risks and placing too much trust in the markets. "Since trust is a behavioral phenomenon, the behavioral biases that contribute to investor euphoria and the development of a bubble can lead to an excess of trust in the integrity of market participants." Financial regulation inherently suffers from a free rider problem with an incentive to permit questionable practices as long as such behavior is tolerated by other regulators. Further, regulators are often reluctant to discourage banks from lending during asset bubbles since doing so could lead to a crisis. Likewise, government may also be reluctant to alert voters to asset bubbles. Bubbles actually trigger "political pressure to deregulate financial markets and dilute securities regulation...[which] manifests itself not only in efforts to roll back laws that would otherwise deter fraud, but also in under-enforcement of existing laws and resistance to proposals to address concerns about speculation or the growing risk of fraud."

For these reasons, it is all the more important that national regulators work together to avoid a free rider problem as well as to de-politicize regulation which may stifle short-term innovation but protect long-term wealth.

Prior to the financial crisis, many of the largest banks were registered with the SEC and therefore required to file periodic and annual


228. Unterman, supra note 181, at 80.
229. Gerding, supra note 188, at 421.
230. Professor Wilmarth has summarized the regulatory failures that led to the subprime mortgage crisis accurately and succinctly: "Over the past decade, regulators in developed nations encouraged the expansion of large financial conglomerates and failed to restrain their pursuit of short-term profits through increased leverage and high-risk activities." Wilmarth, supra note 203, at 1049.
231. JOHN CALVERLEY, BUBBLES AND HOW TO SURVIVE THEM 167 (2004).
232. Id.
233. Gerding, supra note 188, at 395.
reports. Yet, such disclosure failed to protect investors from a loss of $8 trillion on the U.S. equity markets alone. Rather than continue the cyclical pattern of lax regulation during periods of rapid economic growth followed by the adoption of a hodgepodge of new draconian national laws which might do little to deter future detrimental behavior, the legislatures and securities regulators should agree to international standards of liability that will act to cure these market extremes. While this might appear overly ambitious, the alternative is to continue the ineffective, but politically expedient adoption of yet further regulations that are powerless to predict the next financial crisis. Financial regulators charged with ensuring efficient markets have been unable to provide regulatory supervision sufficient to prevent financial crises, and market participants are not deterred from the current liability regime. Indeed, many argue that penalties and the possibility of liability are already too high. In U.S. law, Rule 10b-5 has become synonymous with harsh regulation. The U.S. SEC also has a "reputation as a ruthless enforcer with a 'take no prisoners' mentality." However, others have pointed out that the SEC has not always been aggressive in prosecuting wrongdoing. For example, in the case of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, the SEC is sometimes reluctant to impose penalties since any penalties assigned to a corporation "ultimately ... are borne by shareholders." Closer examination shows that criminal prosecutions under 10b-5 "consistently offer[ ] neither effectual retribution nor effective deterrence." However, "[c]orporate fraud scandals continue in the United States and resulting damages are growing, even with current regulations in place." In addition, the

237. Atkins & Bondi, supra note 99, at 398. The authors describe Section 308's Fair Fund distribution in the following manner: "The Fair Fund distribution thus creates a circular situation: The Commission penalizes a corporation to put the money into a fund to reimburse the shareholders who were themselves just indirectly penalized." Atkins & Bondi, supra note 99, at 398 n.171.
239. See Shelley Thompson, The Globalization of Securities Markets: Effects on Investor Protection, 41 Int'l L. & Pol'y 1121, 1126 (2007). Thompson argues that the dramatic litigation settlements in recent years "are not driven by frivolous litigation," but rather by the "massive fraud" by particular companies, including the $6.2 billion WorldCom settlement out of a total of $9.4 billion in securities litigation settlements in 2005. Id. at 1125. Thompson further notes that "[o]f
European regulatory framework suffers from a lack of cohesiveness owing to the various cultural and legislative practices among member states that lead to uneven enforcement of common directives.\textsuperscript{240} For example, the Transparency Directive only sets minimum standards which member states may enhance, thereby creating room for variations among member states with regard to ongoing disclosure obligations.\textsuperscript{241} In addition, where EU securities law harmonization leaves member states no room for substantive variation in the design of national regulation, the fact that its private and public enforcement is almost purely a matter for the member states means that, in sum, differences in national securities law regimes are of significant relevance even with regard to the detailed prescriptions of EU directives. For example, in the U.K., the FSA is guided by principle-based regulation\textsuperscript{242} that seeks, where possible, to avoid prescriptive rules which have not been able to prevent misconduct.\textsuperscript{243} However, the FSA has been criticized that its “light touch” principle-based regulation approach has been a primary catalyst for the failure of major U.K. banks and financial institutions as well as the collapse of the U.K. securitization market since the summer of 2007.\textsuperscript{244} Only rigorous sanctions that are administered fairly and consistently can provide the deterrence necessary to discourage overly risky behavior.

Rather than vigorously enforcing sanctions, the SEC and other regulators have been lax in prosecuting violations. The past three de-
cades have seen periods of economic bubbles accompanied by lax enforcement of regulation followed by aggressive steps by legislatures to adopt increased legislation.245 “This cycle of decay and re-growth is propelled by the dynamics of stock market bubbles and the epidemics of fraud that they generate.”246 Moreover, recent financial crises have seen the rise of a “new breed of corporate executives who are unconstrained by the traditional devices”247 of financial regulation. More worrying, at least in the context of the subprime crisis, governments have even tacitly endorsed and rewarded overly risky activities by bailing out financial institutions. One expert describes the dilemma in the following manner:

Allowing major institutions to profit from irresponsible financial dealings and then intervening when they get in over their heads makes it too easy for these firms to avoid the consequences of their actions. Morally, this action is reprehensible because it bails out the same people responsible for this crisis, inevitably with tax payer money, and has the effect of privatizing profit and socializing loss.248

Against this background, the various national and international securities authorities and regulators should work to establish and enforce common standards of liability which clearly define overly risky behavior and then consistently enforce sanctions to provide an effective deterrent. In the absence of coordinated regulatory cooperation, jurisdictions which adopt harsher financial regulations risk driving financial goods and services to other jurisdictions. According to Professor Coffee, “disparities in enforcement may be able to explain what marginal differences in formal legal rules or disclosure standards cannot explain.”249 In so doing, “[t]hese cascade effects will add up very quickly, carrying with them the potential to set up alternative business regimes that are beyond regulation.250 In addition, “the competition between regulators is not necessarily geared towards achieving regula-

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245. Gerding, supra note 188, at 448. Gerding criticizes regulatory responses to financial crises since they are often “just another episode of new securities laws designed to re-fight the last war by seeking to prevent the unique schemes just committed.” Gerding, supra note 188, at 448.

246. Gerding, supra note 188, at 394.

247. Ribstein, supra note 63, at 9. Ribstein identifies such executives in the aftermath of the Enron scandal, noting that, “These executives are hyper-motivated survivors of a highly competitive tournament ... who have proven their ability to make money while putting on a veneer of loyalty to the firm.” Ribstein, supra note 63, at 9. Ribstein also observes a willingness of such players to engage in risky transactions in a “corporate culture that instils loyalty to insiders” and displays an “an obsession with short-term stock price.” Ribstein, supra note 63, at 9.

248. Unterman, supra note 181, at 81.


tion that is most optimal for the beneficiaries of the regulation,” since the absence of common standards of liability exposes investors to greater risks depending on the effectiveness of local regulators. In a sense, “globalization of the markets results in less stable economies and increased risk for investors around the world” with volatility in one market increasingly affecting conditions in other markets.

The IOSCO has led international efforts to harmonize the regulation of the capital markets and could provide an impetus for national regulatory cooperation on establishing such a common approach. With over one hundred seventy members, including both governmental and private securities regulators, IOSCO has an informal structure and works to achieve “regulatory harmonization through consensus.” IOSCO has formulated an array of principles and reports, largely through its Technical Committee. With regard to disclosure standards, IOSCO published its International Disclosure Standards for Cross-Border Offerings and Initial Listings by Foreign Issuers in 1998 to encourage harmonization. The SEC adopted these standards in 1999, by revising its Form 20-F, the form which outlines foreign issuers’ disclosure and accounting requirements. Following these efforts to cooperate in the area of disclosure, IOSCO should focus its attention on establishing an international liability standard that will be an effective deterrent against future overly risky behavior in the financial markets. The introduction and enforcement of a common international standard for liability would help to limit the ability of companies to engage in regulatory arbitrage. Likewise, such a common liability standard would enhance the scope of cooperation among national regulators in enforcing their respective securities regimes.

251. Chiu, supra note 8, at 765.
252. Thompson, supra note 239, at 1127.
256. Id. at 565.
257. Id. at 564.
260. See Zaring, supra note 255, at 567.
RECONSIDERING DISCLOSURE AND LIABILITY

The current research concedes that defining particular behavior to be discouraged is necessarily difficult, and the legislature and financial regulators must work in concert to determine what standards to adopt. Under U.S. law, § 24 of the Securities Act assigns criminal liability to "[a]ny person who willfully violates" its provisions or rules and regulations adopted by the SEC thereunder. However, the precise definition of "willfully" remains elusive, with both courts and legal experts grappling over various formulations. This regulatory lacunae necessarily leaves market participants open to develop practices without adequate guidance from regulators. It is therefore disingenuous of legislatures to create new laws in reaction to financial abuses without adequately providing standards that would have deterred such behavior in the first place. Without a robust legal regime to discourage overly risky behavior that can harm the public good, disclosure alone will be ineffective. Without vigorous enforcement, these penalties lack a deterrent effect as one expert eloquently points out:

The politicians appear to rely on the notion that potential offenders will be deterred from engaging in wrongdoing because they will fear longer terms of incarceration. This rationale relies on the faulty assumption: that these lengthy terms of imprisonment and high fines actually will be meted out. Numerous variables play a role in determining the actual sentence imposed by the courts... which enables greater judicial discretion in sentencing offenders.

In response to the financial crisis, the FSA has taken a more aggressive approach, pledging to engage in enforcement actions as a "credible deterrence" tool against rogue firms or individuals. These aggressive actions by the FSA and the SEC in the wake of the financial crisis go a long way to restoring investor confidence in the market. However, these steps in the U.S. and U.K. fall short of a concerted approach to liability in the international regulation of securities. As has been argued above, only such a unified, consistent approach to liability and enforcement will deter future crises.

261. 15 U.S.C.A. § 77x (LexisNexis through P.L. 111-359 (with a gap of P.L. 111-350)).
262. See generally Michael L. Seigel, Bringing Coherence to Mens Rea Analysis for Securities-Related Offenses, 2006 Wis. L. Rev. 1563 (2006). Professor Seigel summarizes various explanations of the meaning of "willfully," finally noting that the leading commentator on U.S. securities law Louis Loss had "also failed to adequately address the interpretation of the word 'willfully' in his seminal work on securities regulation." Id. at 1584-90.
263. See generally J. Robert Brown, Jr., Corporate Governance, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Limits of Disclosure, 57 Cath. U. L. Rev. 45 (2007). According to Professor Brown, "In the absence of strong underlying legal obligations, the use of disclosure as a tool to regulate substantive behavior is far less effective." Id. at 79.
IV. Conclusion

As investors have unprecedented access to opportunities around the globe, financial crises which begin in a particular sector or market have the potential to spill over into other sectors and markets. The global repercussions of the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis illustrate the interdependence of the modern international financial system and the speed with which localized problems can spread.

The history of financial regulation has been punctuated by regulators chasing after ever more innovative bankers and the products which earn their bonuses. "The only effective antidotes to fraud are active and vigilant markets and professionals with strong incentives to investigate corporate managers and dig up corporate information."266 While sunlight continues to be the best disinfectant, securities regulation systems based on disclosure could be substantially strengthened by adopting - and consistently enforcing in times of both boom and bust - stricter liability for fraudulent and overly risky investment activities, which could help to disincentivize reckless behavior.

266. See Ribstein, supra note 63, at 3.