Federal Court



Cour fédérale

Date: 20160603

Docket: IMM-4548-15

Citation: 2016 FC 622

Ottawa, Ontario, June 3, 2016

PRESENT: The Honourable Madam Justice Strickland

BETWEEN:

MERAB KATSIASHVILI

Applicant

and

THE MINISTER OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Respondent

JUDGMENT AND REASONS

[1] This is an application for judicial review of a decision of the Refugee Protection Division of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada ("RPD"), dated September 11, 2015, finding that the Applicant had failed to establish his identity pursuant to s 106 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, SC 2001, c 27 ("TRPA") and that his claim had no credible basis pursuant to s 107(2) of the IRPA.

Background

[2] The Applicant claims to be a citizen of Georgia who fears persecution for his political opinion based on his membership in the United National Movement ("UNM"). He claims that on June 12, 2015 he traveled from Georgia to Ukraine where he remained until June 30, 2015. He then departed for Germany where he remained until July 2, 2015. During that time, he acquired a false Greek passport which he used to travel to Cuba. On July 9, 2015 he traveled from Cuba to Toronto and claims that he destroyed his false Greek passport during the flight. He arrived in Canada with only a photocopy of the identity page from his Georgian passport and claims that he destroyed his Georgian passport in Germany. He claimed refugee status on July 10, 2015.

Decision Under Review

The RPD noted that at the hearing the Applicant had been asked why he had destroyed his genuine Georgian passport. His response was that he thought he should, that he thought he would be sent back to Georgia if he arrived with it, and, that its destruction was his own idea. He also testified that he had a national identity card and an expired passport in Georgia, but that he had made no effort to have the documents sent to Canada because he was not aware he would need them. However, he testified that other documents had been sent to him by his parents in Georgia, including: a translated UNM party membership card; a translated letter from the UNM; two translated medical documents; and three translated letters. Yet, when asked whether anyone in Georgia could send other documents, he replied in the negative. When asked again why he did not have his identity card sent, he replied that he did not think it was needed and that it is

written in Georgian. The RPD noted that the documents he had provided were all translated and, therefore, he knew he could provide that type of evidence.

- Based on this testimony, the RPD found the Applicant's reasons for making no efforts to obtain his genuine identity card and expired passport not to be credible. The RPD found that the Applicant had resources and had given thought to obtaining documents, as demonstrated by the medical reports which were issued after he arrived in Canada. Further, that the Applicant had been represented by an experienced lawyer since the filing of his basis of claim ("BOC") form. It was not credible that, even if he did not know that his original identity documents were needed, he would not have been advised of this by his counsel.
- At the hearing, after all submissions were complete, the Applicant stated that he actually had his original Georgian driver's licence in Toronto, it had been sent to him by his father with his other documents. Counsel made an application to submit post-hearing evidence on identity which the RPD subsequently denied. The RPD found that the licence, assuming it was genuine, would be probative new evidence and relevant to personal identity, although not necessarily national identity. However, when considering the Applicant's efforts to provide the documents in accordance with the *Refugee Protection Division Rules*, SOR/2012-256 ("RPD Rules"), it had found the Applicant not credible. As the Applicant had testified that nothing other than the submitted documents had been sent to him from Georgia, the RPD found it disingenuous to announce during closing submissions that in fact he had possessed government-issued photo identification all along. The RPD concluded the Applicant could have easily provided the

document in accordance with the RPD Rules. It denied the application to file post-hearing evidence on that basis.

- The RPD determined that the Applicant had failed to comply with Rule 11 and s 106 of the IRPA and drew a negative credibility inference. The Applicant had failed to provide a reasonable explanation for the lack of documentation and failed to take reasonable steps to obtain the documentation. Given this, the RPD placed no weight on the purported copy of his passport page (*Diallo v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2014 FC 878 at para 10 [*Diallo*]). The RPD also gave the other documents submitted by the Applicant little weight as none bore a picture or any information that could connect the Applicant to the documents. Although the Applicant's testimony in the Georgian language about the country's politics and geography could indicate residence, the RPD afforded it no weight given its credibility findings.
- The RPD also referred to the Applicant's 2012 visa application using the same name, date of birth and nationality, but noted that it also contained inconsistencies with the Applicant's current evidence. His visa application stated that he had traveled in the Benelux area and that he worked in the travel industry. The Applicant testified that neither was true and that the person who completed the application on his behalf included the false information. The RPD found his explanation, that he did not know about the inconsistencies, not credible, and gave no weight to the visa application as proof of his identity.
- [8] Finally, because the Applicant failed to establish his identity, the RPD found that there was no credible basis to his claim (*Behary v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration*), 2015 FC

794 [Behary]). Without establishing his nationality and identity, the Applicant could not establish that a danger in Georgia has any connection to him or that his profile would place him at risk.

Issues

- [9] The Applicant submits that four issues arise in this matter however, in my view, the issues can be framed as follows:
 - 1) Was the RPD's assessment of the Applicant's credibility and evidence on identity reasonable?
 - 2) Did the RPD err by refusing to accept the Applicant's post-hearing evidence?

Standard of Review

- [10] Where the standard of review is well-settled by past jurisprudence, a reviewing Court may accept that standard (*Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*, 2008 SCC 9 at para 62 [*Dunsmuir*]). The RPD's credibility findings, including the assessment of identity documents, are essentially pure findings of fact that are entitled to deference and are reviewable on a reasonableness standard (*Behary* at para 7; *Selvarasu v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2015 FC 849 at para 29; *Bagire v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2013 FC 816 at para 18).
- [11] Reasonableness is concerned with the existence of justification, transparency and intelligibility in the decision-making process and also whether the decision falls within a range of possible, acceptable outcomes which are defensible in respect of the facts and the law (*Dunsmuir* at para 47; *Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*) v Khosa, 2009 SCC 12 at para 59 [Khosa]).

[12] Although not addressed by the parties in their written submissions, this Court has previously treated the RPD's decisions on applications to submit post-hearing evidence under Rule 43 as an issue of procedural fairness which attracts the correctness standard of review (Behary at para 6; Farkas v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2014 FC 542 at paras 10-11; Cox v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2012 FC 1220 at para 18 [Cox]; Khosa at para 43; Hernandez v Canada (Immigration and Citizenship), 2016 FC 144 at para 3).

Issue 1: Was the RPD's assessment of the Applicant's credibility and evidence on identity reasonable?

Applicant's Position

- [13] The Applicant submits that the RPD's conclusions regarding the credibility of the Applicant's testimony and other documents are anchored in its identity findings, which is an error because identity is just one element of the broader credibility assessment. Further, s 106 of the IRPA makes it clear that identity findings are to be made in the context of a credibility analysis (*Kaur v Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2005 FC 103 at para 17). The RPD was required to assess the Applicant's testimony and corroborative documents instead of making a general negative credibility finding in the face of the claimant's failure to provide the photo identification that is available to him.
- [14] The Applicant also submits that the RPD must consider all other evidence when making a finding on identity (*Teweldebrhan v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2015 FC 418 at paras 19-20 [*Teweldebrhan*]; *Jiang v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2007 FC 1292 at para 7; *Islam v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2015 FC 226). This Court has also found

that the RPD errs when it rejects corroborative documents based on an initial credibility assessment (*John v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2011 FC 387 at para 6; *Chen v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2013 FC 311 at para 20). Further, the RPD erred in finding that the supporting documents contained no security features (*Chavez v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2015 FC 442 at para 13). The Applicant also submits that the RPD erred by speculating that the Applicant would have known that he needed original identity documents (*Ukleina v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2009 FC 1292).

[15] The Applicant further submits that the RPD's determination that no weight should be given to the Applicant's prior visa application on the basis of inconsistencies is unreasonable. The Applicant explained that the false information in the visa application was given by a third party in an attempt to fraudulently obtain a visa to leave Georgia. The Applicant submits that refugee claimants are frequently required to obtain fraudulent documents, the use or destruction of which is peripheral and of very limited value as a determination of general credibility (Attakora v Canada (Minister of Employment and Immigration), [1989] FCJ No 444 (FCA); Rasheed v Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration), 2004 FC 587; Jagernauth v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2013 FC 29). The inconsistent information is not relevant to his identity as a citizen of Georgia.

Respondent's Position

[16] The Respondent submits that it is clear from the RPD's reasons that the Applicant did not possess acceptable documentation establishing his personal and national identity, his testimony and explanations were not credible, and, he failed to take reasonable steps to obtain key material

evidence. The Respondent submits that the Applicant adopts an interpretation of the RPD's reasons that is too narrow and segmented. The initial credibility findings result from an overall absence of a credible explanation of why the Applicant destroyed his passport and failed to present key evidence when it required little effort to do so. It is not solely the result of a lack of documents. The Court has characterized identity differently than other credibility findings, as a "crucial, threshold issue" (*Behary* at paras 18-32). Identity is determinative (*Naeem v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2014 FC 1134 at para 5 [*Naeem*]) and failure to prove it is fatal to a claim (*Elmi v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2008 FC 773 at para 4 [*Elmi*]).

[17] Further, the Respondent submits that identity is a sufficient basis on which to conclude that a claim lacks a credible basis (*Rahaman v Canada* (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2002 FCA 89 at paras 28-30). When personal identity has not been established, other elements also cannot be established (*Naeem* at para 15; *Behary* at paras 59, 61). This directly contradicts the Applicant's submission that the RPD erred by focusing too heavily on identity. Further, the RPD did, in fact, assess the Applicant's testimony and determined that it was a negative factor. The RPD also assessed the Applicant's other supporting documents, but found that they did not displace the main conclusion on credibility given the lack of photographs, biometric features and information on nationality and lack of security features.

Analysis

[18] Section 106 of the IRPA requires the RPD to take into account, with respect to the credibility of a claimant, whether they possess "acceptable documentation establishing identity".

And, if they do not, the RPD must consider whether the claimant has provided a reasonable

explanation for the lack of documentation or has taken reasonable steps to obtain documentation. Similarly, Rule 11 of the RPD Rules requires a claimant to provide acceptable documents establishing their identity and other elements of their claim. A claimant who does not do so must explain why they did not provide the documents and what steps they took to obtain them. Rule 42(1)(b) of the RPD Rules states that a claimant who has provided a copy of a document must provide the original no later than at the beginning of the procedure during which the document will be used. In addition, the BOC form, which was completed by the Applicant, states that an applicant is responsible for obtaining and providing the RPD with any documents that might support his or her claim.

- [19] Although the Applicant submits that identity documents are only one element of a broader credibility assessment that the RPD was required to undertake, in my view this fails to acknowledge the importance of such documents as demonstrated by s 106 of the IRPA and Rule 11 of the RPD Rules. When such documents are available, they must be provided.
- [20] In that regard, this Court has held that the RPD correctly interprets s 106 as requiring refugee claimants to provide acceptable documentation establishing identity. However, it also recognizes the difficulty in proving national identity with the usual documentation from countries that have unstable civil administrations and that persons in such circumstances ought to be afforded other means of proving their national identity (*Elmi* at paras 22-23).
- [21] However, there is no evidence of such circumstances in the present case. Indeed, the evidence was that national identity documentation exists and that other documentation had

previously been sent to the Applicant from Georgia at his request. Thus, this is not a situation where acceptable documentation could not have been provided. Rather, this case is concerned with why the Applicant failed to produce the documentation he acknowledges he had in his possession or could obtain.

- The Applicant was asked why he had not provided original identity documents. In my view, it was clearly open to the RPD to reject as unreasonable his explanations. When asked why he destroyed his passport, he explained that he thought he should. When asked why he had not requested that his original national identity card to be sent to him, as he had done with other documents, he explained that he did not think he would need it. It was also open to the RPD, based on the Applicant's testimony, to find that he had not taken reasonable steps to obtain his national identity card or expired passport.
- [23] It must be recalled that in matters of identity and credibility, the RPD is owed deference. This is illustrated in *Diarra v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2014 FC 123:
 - [22] This Court has found on numerous occasions that the issue of identity is at the very core of the RPD's expertise; thus, the Court needs to caution itself not to simply second-guess the RPD. As stated by Justice Mary Gleason in *Rahal v Canada* (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2012 FC 319:
 - [48] ... In my view, provided that there is some evidence to support the Board's identity-related conclusions, provided the RPD offers some reasons for its conclusions (that are not clearly specious) and provided there is no glaring inconsistency between the Board's decision and the weight of the evidence in the record, the RPD's determination on identity warrants deference and will fall within the purview of a reasonable decision. In other words, if these factors pertain, the determination cannot be said to have been made in a perverse or capricious

manner or without regard to the evidence. [Emphasis added.]

. .

- [31] The Court finds that the RPD based its decision on the totality of the evidence before it, and given the lack of acceptable identity documentation, it was open to reject the Applicant's explanations and to impugn his credibility for not adducing such documents.
- [32] It is trite law that in situations where an applicant has not established identity, a negative conclusion as to credibility will almost inevitably also be drawn, and can, in and of itself, be dispositive of the claim (*Uwitonze v Canada* (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2012 FC 61, 403 FTR 217 at para 32; *Morka v Canada* (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2007 FC 315 at para 10; *Rahman v Canada* (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2005 FC 1495 at para 22-23).
- [33] In this case, there were a number of clearly identified problems with the Applicant's identity documentation which had a significant bearing on the RPD's overall credibility finding, and they ultimately proved to be fatal to the Applicant's claim. The RPD's decision falls well within a range of possible, acceptable outcomes.
- [24] And, identity is always an issue in s 96 and s 97 hearings. This would have been known to the Applicant's counsel who would also have known that if the Applicant was unable to satisfy the RPD as to his identity then it was not compelled to consider his case on the merits (*Behary* at para 18; *Jin v Canada* (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2006 FC 126 at paras 12-13; *Elmi* at para 4; *Diallo* at para 3; *Liu v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2007 FC 831 at para 18; *Ibnmogdad v Canada* (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*), 2004 FC 321 at para 24). The Applicant has not asserted incompetence of counsel. Accordingly, I do not agree with the Applicant's submission that the RPD speculated in finding that the Applicant would have known or been informed of the need for original identity documents. It was

reasonable for the RPD to infer that the Applicant would have known of the importance of identity and of proper documentation in establishing identity.

- [25] The Applicant is correct, however, that the jurisprudence required that the RPD also consider and assess the other documents submitted by the Applicant in support of his identity:
 - Notwithstanding that the RPD was entitled to set aside the presumption of validity of Mr. Teweldebrhan's identity documents, it was still required to at least consider and assess the authenticity and probative value of each of those documents, as well as the affidavits and the letters that he submitted in support of his application (*Jiang v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship & Immigration*), 2007 FC 1292 (F.C.) at paras 6-7; *Lin v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship & Immigration*), 2012 FC 157 (F.C.) at para 55). The RPD's failure to do so rendered unreasonable its determination that Mr. Teweldebrhan had not established his identity on a balance of probabilities.

(Teweldebrhan at para 19; also see Zheng v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2008 FC 877 at para 15; Jiang v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2007 FC 1292 at para 3; Lin v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2012 FC 157 at para 55)

[26] However, the RPD did consider the Applicant's other documents. The RPD drew a negative credibility inference from the Applicant's lack of acceptable identity documentation, his failure to provide a reasonable explanation for the lack of documentation and his failure to take reasonable steps to obtain it. Based on those findings, it placed no weight on the copy of the Applicant's passport page. Given the circumstances, particularly the failure to provide a reasonable explanation as to why the Applicant had destroyed his Georgian passport and had not taken any steps to have his expired passport sent to him, it was open to the RPD to afford no weight to the photocopy of the passport.

- The RPD also considered the Applicant's other documents, being a translated UNM party membership card and letter from the UNM, three translated letters and two translated hospital reports; however, it noted that none of them included a photograph of the Applicant, biometric information or any attestation as to the Applicant's nationality. The RPD concluded that the documents contained no information that could connect the Applicant to the documents. It afforded them little weight in the face of the Applicant's failure to provide photo identification that was available to him.
- The Applicant also submits that the RPD erred by failing to consider his testimony in the Georgian language and his provision of "spontaneous" information about Georgia. Again, however, this testimony was considered but was given no weight because of the RPD's credibility concerns. In my view, in a circumstance such as this where available acceptable identity documentation was not provided, nor was a reasonable explanation for this given, the RPD was entitled to make a negative credibility finding and to reject the Applicant's testimonial evidence, such as knowledge of a language or of geography or politics of the purported nationality, on that basis. In that regard, I would note that s 106 clearly contemplates the provision of documentary evidence.
- [29] Regarding the Applicant's prior visa application, the Applicant submits that the false information was necessary in order to escape Georgia. However, in his BOC the Applicant states that he joined the UNM in 2012 and that his first problem arose in September 16, 2012, which is after he made his visa application in July 2012. Further, the Applicant testified that he was unaware of the falsehoods in the application since it was completed by a third party, but made no

mention of the necessity of making a fraudulent application in order to seek refuge abroad. Further, that the RPD is entitled to compare immigration documents and draw negative credibility findings based on inconsistencies (*Sheikh v Canada* (*Minister of Employment and Immigration*), [1990] 3 FC 238 (CA); *Kaleja v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2011 FC 668 at para 18; *Shatirishvili v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2014 FC 407 at para 29) and it is not required to accept a claimant's explanation for an inconsistency (*Gulabzada v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2014 FC 547 at para 9; *Houshan v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2010 FC 650 at para 19). It was open to the RPD to impugn the credibility of the Applicant based on inconsistencies in the content of the visa application and to afford it no weight when assessing his identity.

[30] The Applicant submits that the RPD made its initial credibility finding on a lack of identity documents and, on that basis, gave no weight to his testimony and corroborative documents. However, in my view, in the factual circumstance of this matter the RPD was entitled to make a negative credibility inference and to afford little or no weight to corroborative evidence. The identity documents were available but not provided nor was a reasonable explanation given for this and the Applicant failed to demonstrate that he had made any reasonable efforts to provide the documents. The negative credibility inference was based on more than the mere failure to provide acceptable documents. In any event, it was reasonable for the RPD to find that the other documents could not establish either the Applicant's identity or his nationality.

[31] For these reasons, the RPD's assessment of the Applicant's credibility and evidence as to his identity was reasonable.

Issue 2: Did the RPD err by refusing to accept the Applicant's post-hearing evidence?

Applicant's Position

- The Applicant notes that the RPD found his driver's licence would be probative and relevant to the question of personal identity, but refused to accept it on the basis of its analysis that the most compelling factor was that it could have been provided as required by the RPD Rules. The Applicant further notes that the licence bears the Applicant's photograph, date of birth, a serial number, is valid until May 14, 2030 and states that it was issued in Gurjaani, Georgia, where the Applicant stated he was a member of the UNM.
- [33] The Applicant submits that the RPD's decision was not reasonable given the high probative value of the document and the fact that the RPD had determined that the central issue in the claim was identity. As a central document, the licence should not have been excluded solely because it was submitted late. The refusal to accept the document was contrary to natural justice and was unreasonable (*Kamau v Canada* (*Citizenship and Immigration*), 2016 FC 413 [*Kamau*]).

[34] The Respondent submits that the RPD properly explained why it declined to consider post-hearing evidence and discharged its duty to explain why the evidence was not being admitted. The Respondent further submits that there was no substantial wrong or miscarriage of justice given the lack of probative value. The application for late disclosure lacked credibility as the Applicant had notice and time to prepare for the hearing, there was no good reason for the lateness and the Applicant was represented by experienced counsel. Nor would the licence be probative of national identity. The RPD properly considered Rule 43 and did not fetter its determination. The RPD's credibility findings are reasonable even when the driver's licence is taken into account. In essence, by asking the Court to intervene on this basis, the Applicant asks it to find that one piece of evidence would have outweighed all the other findings, which is not the Court's role.

Analysis

[35] At the conclusion of the hearing, and subsequent to his testimony that he had neither received, nor was anyone able to send him, further documents from Georgia, the Applicant stated that he actually had his original Georgian driver's licence at his home in Toronto which had been sent to him from Georgia. The Applicant made an application, pursuant to Rule 43 of the RPD Rules, to provide the driver's licence as evidence after the hearing but before a decision takes effect.

- [36] In deciding that application, the RPD is required by Rule 43(3) to consider any relevant factors including:
 - (a) the document's relevance and probative value;
 - (b) any new evidence the document brings to the proceedings; and
 - (c) whether the party, with reasonable effort, could have provided the document was required by Rule 34.
- [37] The RPD agreed that the licence, if genuine, would be probative and relevant to the question of personal identity, although not necessarily for national identity, and that it would be new evidence but, based on his testimony, found that the Applicant could have with reasonable effort, provided the document in a timely manner in accordance with the Rules. It found this factor to be the most compelling and denied the application on that basis.
- [38] As addressed above, it is clear that the Applicant provided no reasonable explanation for his failure to provide the licence in accordance with the Rules. The RPD also found it disingenuous for the Applicant to raise the existence of the licence at the end of the hearing, despite having been asked repeatedly about identity documents throughout the hearing.
- [39] As I have previously stated in *Behary*:
 - While I am not convinced of the soundness of the RPD's assessment of the lack of probative value of the documents that the Applicant sought to produce in his RPD Rule 43 application, it did not err in its finding that the documents pre-existed the hearing and could have been produced in a timely manner.
 - 30 The RPD has no duty to accept evidence or allow submissions after the hearing (*Farkas* at para 12). Similarly to an application for an adjournment, there is no absolute right to the requested relief. As an administrative tribunal, the RPD has the

- discretion to accept or deny a RPD Rule 43 application. Therefore, when the RPD refuses such an application, the circumstances must be analysed in order to determine whether there was a breach of procedural fairness (*Julien* at para 28).
- In that regard, the RPD was required to consider the factors enumerated in RPD Rule 43 and any other relevant factors when making its decision, which it did. Accordingly, there was no breach of procedural fairness in that regard (*Behaz v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship & Immigration*), 2005 FC 791(F.C.)). Having considered the required factors, the RPD rendered a decision that fell within the range of possible acceptable outcomes...
- [40] As stated in *Kamau*, the RPD has the discretion to admit or refuse post-hearing evidence, but must do so in accordance with Rule 43 (at para 65). There the RPD excluded evidence, a letter, simply because it could have been provided in time for the hearing. Justice Russell found that the RPD was required to go further and weigh all of the enumerated factors (*Cox* at paras 26-27) but had failed to consider relevance and probative value of the evidence. Its relevance and probative value for the central issue in the claim were high and, had they been considered, the RPD might have admitted the evidence.
- [41] Here, however, the RPD considered all of the factors as is required by Rule 43(3). And, given the circumstances, it was reasonably open to the RPD to afford more weight to the fact that, with reasonable effort, the Applicant could have provided the document in accordance with Rule 34. The lack of any reasonable explanation supports this. Accordingly, the RPD's decision falls within the range of reasonable outcomes.

JUDGMENT

THIS COURT'S JUDGMENT is that

- 1. The application for judicial review is dismissed.
- 2. There shall be no order as to costs.
- 3. No question of general importance for certification was proposed or arises.

"Cecily	Y. Strickland"
Judge	

FEDERAL COURT

SOLICITORS OF RECORD

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