

United States District Court
Northern District of California

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

SERGEI POGADAEV, et al.,
Plaintiffs,
v.
AEROFLOT-RUSSIAN AIRLINES,
Defendant.

Case No. 16-cv-04718-RS

**ORDER GRANTING DEFENDANT'S
MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT
AND DENYING PLAINTIFFS' MOTION
FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT**

I. INTRODUCTION

Husband and wife plaintiffs Sergei Pogadaev and Irina Pogadajeva were booked on a roundtrip to and from Russia on flights operated by defendant Public Joint Stock Company “Aeroflot - Russian Airlines.” They entered and traveled within Russia on Aeroflot without incident. When plaintiffs sought to board their flight back out of the country—from Moscow to Paris—Irina was denied boarding on grounds that her passport was set to expire in fewer than 90 days, and therefore was not valid for travel under “the Schengen Borders Code.” In this action, plaintiffs seek to recover approximately \$12,400 in damages they contend they suffered as a direct result of Irina having been denied boarding.

Pursuant to Civil Local Rule 7-1(b), the parties’ cross-motions for summary judgment have been submitted for decision without oral argument. Because the undisputed facts show that defendant is not liable given Irina Pogadajeva’s failure to present a passport that was sufficient under the applicable rules, defendant’s motion will be granted and plaintiffs’ motion will be

1 denied.

2 II. BACKGROUND

3 In July of 2016, Plaintiffs were engaged in international travel by air pursuant to non-
4 refundable Aeroflot passenger tickets that provided for roundtrip carriage from and to Italy, as
5 follows: Florence (Italy) to Paris (France) to Moscow (Russia) to Kemerovo (Russia) to Moscow
6 to Paris to Florence. Plaintiffs point out that the Aeroflot tickets were purchased as part of a larger
7 round trip beginning and terminating in San Francisco, and including travel through Germany.

8 There is no dispute that on the return leg from Moscow to Paris, Irina Pogadajeva was
9 denied boarding on Aeroflot Flight SU 4454, for the proffered reason that her U.S. Passport was
10 not valid for travel to France and Italy under the Schengen Borders Code. There is also no dispute
11 that Sergei Pogadaev was not expressly denied boarding, although he understandably elected to
12 stay behind with his wife. Plaintiffs then obtained tickets for transport on Air France to Paris, and
13 on to San Francisco, but in doing so incurred the additional costs they claim in damages in this
14 action. The record is not clear as to why the pending expiration of Irina Pogadajeva's passport did
15 not preclude her from traveling on the Air France flight.

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17 III. LEGAL STANDARD

18 Summary judgment is proper "if the pleadings and admissions on file, together with the
19 affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and that the moving
20 party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law." Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c). The purpose of summary
21 judgment "is to isolate and dispose of factually unsupported claims or defenses." *Celotex v.*
22 *Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 323-24 (1986). The moving party "always bears the initial responsibility of
23 informing the district court of the basis for its motion, and identifying those portions of the
24 pleadings and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any which it believes demonstrate
25 the absence of a genuine issue of material fact." *Id.* at 323 (citations and internal quotation marks
26 omitted). If it meets this burden, the moving party is then entitled to judgment as a matter of law
27 when the non-moving party fails to make a sufficient showing on an essential element of the case
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1 with respect to which he bears the burden of proof at trial. *Id.* at 322-23.

2 The non-moving party “must set forth specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue
3 for trial.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(e). The non-moving party cannot defeat the moving party’s properly
4 supported motion for summary judgment simply by alleging some factual dispute between the
5 parties. To preclude the entry of summary judgment, the non-moving party must bring forth
6 material facts, *i.e.*, “facts that might affect the outcome of the suit under the governing law
7 Factual disputes that are irrelevant or unnecessary will not be counted.” *Anderson v. Liberty*
8 *Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 247-48 (1986). The opposing party “must do more than simply show
9 that there is some metaphysical doubt as to the material facts.” *Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v.*
10 *Zenith Radio*, 475 U.S. 574, 588 (1986).

11 The court must draw all reasonable inferences in favor of the non-moving party, including
12 questions of credibility and of the weight to be accorded particular evidence. *Masson v. New*
13 *Yorker Magazine, Inc.*, 501 U.S. 496 (1991) (citing *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 255); *Matsushita*, 475
14 U.S. at 588 (1986). It is the court’s responsibility “to determine whether the ‘specific facts’ set
15 forth by the nonmoving party, coupled with undisputed background or contextual facts, are such
16 that a rational or reasonable jury might return a verdict in its favor based on that evidence.” *T.W.*
17 *Elec. Service v. Pacific Elec. Contractors*, 809 F.2d 626, 631 (9th Cir. 1987). “[S]ummary
18 judgment will not lie if the dispute about a material fact is ‘genuine,’ that is, if the evidence is such
19 that a reasonable jury could return a verdict for the nonmoving party.” *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 248.
20 However, “[w]here the record taken as a whole could not lead a rational trier of fact to find for the
21 non-moving party, there is no ‘genuine issue for trial.’” *Matsushita*, 475 U.S. at 587.

22 23 IV. DISCUSSION

24 The Warsaw Convention, drafted in 1929, previously governed exclusively the rights and
25 liabilities of passengers and carriers in “international” transportation by air. *See El Al Israel*
26 *Airlines, Ltd. v. Tseng*, 525 U.S. 155, 161 (1999). The Montreal Convention is the successor treaty
27 to the Warsaw Convention, *see Hosaka v. United Airlines, Inc.*, 305 F.3d 989, 996 (9th Cir.

1 2002)). It retains many of the same provisions and terms as the original Warsaw Convention, and
2 courts have continued to rely on cases interpreting provisions of the earlier treaty where the
3 equivalent provisions in the Montreal Convention are substantively the same. *See e.g., Narayanan*
4 *v. British Airways*, 747 F.3d 1125, 1127, n. 2 (9th Cir. 2014).

5 The express language of Article 29 of the Convention makes it clear that it, like the earlier
6 Warsaw Convention, preempts a passenger’s federal or state law claims whether “in contract or
7 tort,” and exclusively governs the rights and liabilities of the parties. *See Tseng, supra*, 525 U.S.
8 at 161 (the Convention “precludes passengers from bringing actions under local law,” even when
9 they are unable to establish liability under the Convention); *Carey v. United Airlines*, 255 F.3d
10 1044 (9th Cir. 2001).

11 Article 19 of the Montreal Convention provides:

12 The carrier is liable for damage occasioned by delay in
13 the carriage by air of passengers, baggage or cargo.
14 Nevertheless, the carrier shall not be liable for damage
15 occasioned by delay if it proves that it and its servants
16 and agents took all measures that could reasonably be
17 required to avoid the damage or that it was impossible
18 for it or them to take such measures.

17 Furthermore, Article 20 exonerates the carrier from liability for delay damages “to the extent that
18 [claimant’s] negligence or wrongful act or omission caused or contributed to the damage.”

19 Aeroflot contends that the effect of these provisions is to bar plaintiffs’ claims as long as the
20 decision to deny boarding was legally correct. Plaintiffs do not challenge that basic point, and
21 instead argue only Aeroflot incorrectly or unreasonably applied the rules in concluding that Irina
22 should be denied boarding.¹

23 “Carriers are responsible for verifying that international passengers have the correct travel
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25 ¹ Aeroflot argues it is entitled to summary judgment as to Sergei Pogadaev’s claims because the
26 undisputed facts show he was not denied boarding at all. Given the conclusion in this order that
27 Irina was not wrongfully denied boarding, the court need not reach the question of whether
28 Sergei’s choice to stay behind could have been deemed “voluntary” even if Irina had a viable
claim.

1 documents under the Schengen Agreements, and they face penalties for failing to do so
2 Whether or not [the carrier] advised its passengers of the need to comply with international law,
3 such law would apply.” *Onoh v. Nw. Airlines, Inc.*, 613 F.3d 596, 598 (5th Cir. 2010). Here, the
4 undisputed facts show that Aeroflot is not liable for Irina Pogadajeva’s alleged delay under Article
5 19 of the Montreal Convention because it resulted from her own failure to present a travel
6 document that complied with the requirements of the Schengen Borders Code for travel to France
7 and Italy, as her U.S. Passport was set to expire in fewer than 90 days.

8 The Schengen Borders Code permits people to travel freely within the Schengen area
9 (consisting of 26 European countries, including France and Italy), if the traveler otherwise
10 qualifies to enter the Schengen area, by crossing an official external border in a manner required
11 under the provisions of the Code. Article 6 of the Code provides, in pertinent part,

12 the entry conditions for third country nationals shall be the
13 following:

14 (a) they are in possession of a valid travel document
15 entitling the holder to cross the border
16 satisfying the following criteria:

17 (i) its validity shall extend at least three months after
18 the intended date of departure from the
19 territory of the Member States.

20 Here, there is no factual dispute that Irina Pogadajeva’s passport did not meet this
21 requirement. Plaintiffs’ primary argument is that Aeroflot acted inconsistently, and therefore
22 unreasonably, because it allowed Irina to board the inbound flights at a time when it presumably
23 could have figured out from her itinerary that there could be a problem on the outbound portion
24 of the journey. Plaintiffs have not shown, however, that the passport was already within 90 days
25 of expiration at the time of the inbound flights. As such, it was not “inconsistent” to permit
26 boarding when the passport’s expiration date was outside the 90 window but to deny it once that
27 window had closed. Nor have plaintiffs shown that Aeroflot was under any legal duty to foresee
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1 the issue and to warn plaintiffs of it in advance.² Accordingly, plaintiffs' claims necessarily fail,
2 and defendant is entitled to summary judgment.³

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5 V. CONCLUSION

6 Plaintiffs' motion for summary judgment is denied, and defendant's motion is granted. A
7 separate judgment will issue.

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9 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

10 Dated: July 31, 2017

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12 RICHARD SEEBORG
13 United States District Judge
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23 _____
24 ² There is also no reason to believe that allowing a passenger to make an inbound journey with the
25 90-day window soon closing necessarily will create a problem on the outbound leg. For all a
26 carrier might know, a passenger may be fully intending to receive a passport renewal during the
27 trip.

28 ³ Plaintiffs' additional argument that a different EU regulation demonstrates Aeroflot acted
unreasonably is unavailing for numerous reasons, including plaintiffs' concession that it "is not an
issue in this case."