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Ex-wife of sanctioned former Russian PM wins divorce appeal



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The former Prime Minister of Russia, Vladimir Potanin, is set to face a multi-billion-pound divorce case in England after his ex-wife won her case at the Court of Appeal today.

Natalia Nikolaevna Potanina was married to Potanin for around thirty years before divorcing in Russia in 2014. However, she had argued that the Russian court’s financial relief order was unjust and left her with a ‘paltry’ sum compared to her ex-husband’s vast wealth.

Potanin, described as one of the richest men in Russia, was the founder of the major management company Interros. He held several significant government positions, including acting as the country’s first deputy Prime Minister from 1996 to 1997.

He is currently sanctioned by Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Potanina took her case to the English court, widely considered to be the ‘divorce capital of the world’, as she had been a resident since January 2016.

The case, which has been in and out of the court system, was initially filed in the High Court in early 2019 under the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984, and was heard and granted without notice to the husband.

He applied to set aside the grant of leave. In November of that year, Mr Justice Cohen set aside the initial grant of leave and dismissed Potanina’s renewed application for leave.

Then in 2021, she appealed to the Court of Appeal, which allowed her appeal, reinstating the original grant of leave. But then in 2024, he successfully appealed to the Supreme Court, which remitted the wife’s appeal back to the Court of Appeal for reconsideration.

The case was heard before the court in July, and today, the Court of Appeal approved the wife’s appeal and granted her leave to pursue her claim in England.

Frances Hughes, partner at Hughes Fowler Carruthers, representing Potanina, said: “The decision of the Court of Appeal is a second vindication of our client in making her application in 2019.”

“Our client is grateful for the consideration given by the court to her case and is delighted that the Court of Appeal has recognised, for the second time, the merits of her application. She very much hopes that her case can now be resolved and can be concluded without further delay,” she added.

Commenting on the outcome, Sarah Jane Lenihan, partner at Dawson Cornwell, stated that “few expected this outcome.”

“The question now is whether it will open the door for others who have divorced overseas to seek a second bite at the cherry in England,” she noted.

While Hayley Trim, Partner at Irwin Mitchell, added, “This is a landmark decision that reinforces the role of the English courts in international divorce proceedings.”