

Ex-wife of Russian tycoon Vladimir Potanin wins right to bring divorce case to London

Legal experts say ruling will help secure the city’s reputation as world’s ‘divorce capital’



Vladimir Potanin was sanctioned by the UK government over his connections with the Kremlin after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine © Maxim Shemetov/Reuters

Alistair Gray in London

Published 3 HOURS AGO | Updated 13:14



The ex-wife of Russian oligarch Vladimir Potanin has won an appeal to bring a multibillion-pound divorce case in England, helping cement London’s reputation as the “divorce capital of the world”.

The Court of Appeal ruled on Thursday that Natalia Potanina can proceed with her claim, which could become one of the biggest settlement cases recorded in the country.

Divorce lawyers said the long-running [Potanin](#) case could have significant implications for “divorce tourism”, in which spouses turn to the English courts to obtain more favourable payouts than they could elsewhere.

London has earned a reputation for attracting high-value divorce claims from foreign parties because of the perceived generosity of England’s courts in awarding large settlements to financially weaker former partners.

Peter Burgess, partner at Burgess Mee, said the ruling “further cements London’s position as the divorce capital of the world” and for wealthy individuals “who have been badly served abroad, this judgment will be very welcome”.

Potanin, who is among Russia’s wealthiest oligarchs, was [sanctioned by the UK government](#) over his connections with the Kremlin after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

He married Potanina in Russia in 1983, but the couple divorced in 2014. The courts in Russia awarded her approximately \$40mn but she subsequently brought a claim for financial relief in England, arguing she was entitled to a far larger share of her ex-husband’s fortune.

She has contended that she is entitled to an award of about \$6bn, when including wealth tied up in trusts and companies in which her ex-husband is a beneficial owner.

Potanina filed her divorce claim in England seven years ago but the complex case has dragged out. The High Court blocked her claim in 2019 on the basis that the couple had little connection with the UK.

Mr Justice Jonathan Cohen said at the time that if it proceeded, there would in effect be “no limit to divorce tourism”.

But the Court of Appeal on Thursday ruled that this judgment was wrong and Potanina had “solid” grounds for bringing a claim in London.

The panel of three judges said Potanina, although a Russian national, had a “real and meaningful connection” to England, having obtained a UK investor visa and purchased a property in London in 2014.

She had “very largely severed her ties with Russia”, the court said.

Lord Justice Stephen Cobb, Lord Justice Andrew Moylan and Lady Justice Sarah Falk said Potanina was “well placed” to present a strong case that “the outcome of the Russian matrimonial proceedings had been unjust to her”.

The judges said Potanina could make a persuasive case that “having regard to the lavish lifestyle which she had enjoyed while married, her reasonable needs would not be met by the Russian award”.

Hayley Trim, a partner at Irwin Mitchell and a specialist in divorce law, said it was a “landmark decision” that “reinforces the role of the English courts in international divorce proceedings”.

However, Sarah Jane Lenihan, a partner at Dawson Cornwell, said: “The wife may understandably have felt dissatisfied with the Russian settlement, but that alone should not make England the forum of choice.

“Our family courts are already stretched to capacity. However sympathetic one may be to her position, we cannot become the family court of the world.”

Burgess said the case “may still have some way to go as it remains open to Mr Potanin to seek a further appeal to the Supreme Court”.