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WORLD'S BIGGEST DIVORCE Russia’s 2nd richest man to fight ex-wife over £15BILLION fortune in UK – as Putin’s ice hockey pal ‘only’ gave her £30m

She seeks billions more after receiving less than one percent of assets in Russia

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A RUSSIAN oligarch’s estranged wife has won a six-year fight to drag her divorce battle into the English courts.

Natalia Potanina secured a landmark Court of Appeal ruling on Thursday to sue her billionaire ex-husband Vladimir Potanin, who is said to be worth around £15.7billion.

Vladimir Potanin with ex-wife Natalia Potanina Credit: Alamy

Vladimir Putin and Potanin (right) during a meeting in Sochi Credit: Alamy

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Putin greets billionaire and businessman Potanin (left) during a group photo at a hockey match in Sochi, 2019 Credit: Getty

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Potanin is described as Russia's second richest man and a pal of Vladimir Putin through their shared love of ice hockey.

Potanin is the chief executive of Norilsk Nickel, the world's largest palladium producer and a global nickel giant.

But he was sanctioned by the UK and US in 2022 after Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine.

The former couple wed in Russia in 1983, where they lived for their entire married life and raised three children.

They split in acrimonious fashion, with Potanin claiming the marriage ended in 2007.

Potanina insists they only separated in 2013, with a Russian court finalising the divorce a year later.

He has previously claimed their marriage ended when her husband calmly told her over tea that he was leaving her for a younger employee.

She said at first she thought it was a "badly-worded joke" but was later told she "didn't need money" when the subject of a financial settlement arose.

The pair first met as penniless students in the 1970s, when Russia was still under communism.

Potanina argues that her husband only built his fortune after their marriage, and that she supported him throughout his rise.

Despite his £15billion fortune, Potanina was awarded just £30.9million in the Russian courts – less than one per cent of the family wealth.

Lawyers for Potanin argue she actually received around £63m, but she insists the sum barely scratched the surface of their assets.

Now, after years of legal wrangling, Potanina has been cleared to bring a claim in London for financial relief – setting the stage for what could become the world's biggest-ever marital split.

She is seeking half of her ex-husband's beneficial interest in shares in

Norilsk Nickel, along with half of the dividends paid on those shares since 2014.

She also wants half the value of a lavish Moscow mansion known as The Autumn House, on which the couple splashed out around £111million.

She is thought to be seeking around £5billion in total.

At the heart of earlier disputes was the couple's palatial family home in Nemchinovo, 17 miles west of Moscow, where they lived with their three children – daughter Anastasia, and sons Ivan and Vasily.

Also up for grabs were two superyachts, including "The Anastasia," named after their daughter, and "The Nirvana."

Potanina's legal team told the court she had earned her share of the fortune through years of marriage and by being the "main carer" of their children.

Her barrister, Charles Howard KC, branded the earlier dismissal of her case "inconsistent and illogical," accusing the judge of falling into Potanin's trap of repeatedly labelling her a "divorce tourist."

Potanin's lawyers, led by Lord Faulks KC, countered that the couple had "no connection with this jurisdiction during the marriage" and that Potanina only had "recent and modest connections" to England when she applied.

London's High Court originally threw out her claim in 2019, warning that allowing it would mean "no limit to divorce tourism."

That decision was overturned in 2021 by the Court of Appeal, only for Potanin to win a narrow 3-2 victory in the Supreme Court last year, which sent the case back to be reconsidered.

Now, judges Lord Justice Moylan, Lady Justice Falk and Lord Justice Cobb have sided with Potanina once again, ruling she had "substantial grounds" to pursue her claim in England.

Vladimir Potanin and Natalia Potanin, pictured on their wedding day in 1983

Potanin is said to be Russia's second richest man Credit: Getty

The pair met in high school and lived together for thirty years Credit: Alamy

They said there was evidence she had “very largely severed her ties with Russia” and that her connection to the country was “increasingly tenuous.”

The ruling added: “The discrepancy between her award of the marital assets and the husband’s retained share was significant.

"The discrepancy between what she had recovered in Russia compared with what she would have recovered had the case been heard in this jurisdiction was equally significant.”

The Sun reported in 2016 that Potanina was living “in exile” in central London, near Westminster Abbey.

She said at the time to be fearing that if she returned to Russia her passport could be seized, preventing her from visiting her son studying in New York.

She also accused her husband of offering her only medical insurance, a driver, and maintenance for their youngest child, rather than a fair settlement.

The blockbuster ruling reignites fears that London will become the “divorce capital of the world.”

Jennifer Headon, head of international family law at Birketts LLP, said the High Court had already warned such a move could open the floodgates to “limitless” divorce tourism.

Sarah Jane Lenihan, partner at Dawson Cornwell, said few had expected such an outcome, asking: “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."

Sital Fontenelle, head of family law at Kingsley Napley LLP, said the ruling reinforced the UK's status as the "divorce capital of the world" and left the "door still open" for future claims.

Peter Burgess, partner at Burgess Mee, added that aspiring "divorce tourists" might now wait to demonstrate their links to England at a full hearing rather than being knocked back early.

She has previously said her situation reflects the discrimination faced by many women in Russia, where "the law is male, the ideology is male," adding that she had been "deprived of money and driven out of the house."

Potanina's solicitor, Frances Hughes of Hughes Fowler Carruthers, hailed the ruling as a "second vindication" of her client's case, saying Potanina was delighted and now hoped the matter could be "resolved without further delay."

Putin meeting with metals magnate Vladimir Potanin at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow in 2017 Credit: AFP

Potanina seeks billions more from her ex-husband after receiving less than one percent of assets in Russia Credit: Getty