

Russian businessman's ex-wife picks up divorce settlement worth more than £100 million

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The former wife of the oligarch Boris Berezovsky yesterday won Britain's biggest divorce settlement estimated at more than £100 million.

The payout was agreed by Mr Berezovsky a year to the day after his wife, Galina, divorced him in a 45-second hearing because of unreasonable behaviour.

Richard Todd, QC, for Galina Besharova, 52, who uses her maiden name, told Mrs Justice Eleanor King in the High Court in London that the couple "had worked very hard to reach an amicable settlement".

He said there were "very substantial sums involved". Neither side would reveal exactly how much but the judge said: "It does not matter whether the awards are thousands of pounds or hundreds of millions of pounds. "At the end of the day if the husband and wife can reach agreement they can both live with, it bodes much better for their future welfare and for the children of the family and to continue working for the benefit of all of them."

The judge's comments are thought to have given a clue to the award being the largest ever. The payment is thought to have been between £100 million and £200 million, according to divorce lawyers. The previous UK record was a £48 million award to the former wife of the insurance millionaire John Charman in 2006.

Mr Berezovsky's fortune is estimated at £550 million, so a 50-50 split would have given his wife £275 million. However, it is unlikely that a court would have awarded half. After the hearing, Mr Berezovsky said: "I have always believed in British justice and yet again I have been proved right." Ms Besharova was granted a "quickie" undefended divorce from her 64-year-old husband to end their marriage in July last year. District Judge Penny Cushing granted her a decree nisi on the ground that the marriage had irretrievably broken down and she found it intolerable to live with him because of his unreasonable behaviour.

The couple met in Moscow in 1981 when he was a struggling 34-year-old mathematician earning about £60 a month. They married ten years later in November 1991.

It was his second marriage and they have two children Artem, now 21, and Anastasia, now 18. His first marriage was to Nina Vasilievna, by whom he has two daughters Katya and Lisa.

The couple have lived apart for much of their marriage and Mr Berezovsky now lives in a luxury estate at Wentworth Park, Surrey, with Elena Gorbunova, 42, with whom he has two children.

Ms Besharova who lives in a penthouse in Kensington Palace Gardens, West London, said in court documents that while her former husband's unreasonable behaviour was not affecting her health, it was continuing.

Mr Berezovsky said in the court papers that although domiciled in the Russian Federation he was habitually resident in England. He said he had no intention of defending the petition and, asked if he objected to paying the costs, he replied: "No — subject to assessment."

Ms Besharova employed a leading divorce lawyer, Sandra Davis of Mishcon de Reya, whose clients have included the late Diana, Princess of Wales, Thierry Henry and Jerry Hall.

Mr Berezovsky was represented by the divorce barrister Martin Pointer, QC, who said to the judge: "I ask you to approve this settlement."

Ayesha Vardag, a well-known divorce lawyer, said: "Sometimes a big payout is a small price to pay for freedom and the resolution of what will otherwise be a great war sweeping many things in its wake. Sometimes it's worth paying to keep the lid on a can of worms.

"Sometimes both parties know the marriage is over. At that point it's much easier — the emotion is gone, it's about money primarily and it's just a question of finding a number that works. In that number you bind up years of contribution, of sacrifice, of shared history, but at the end of the day it's a story which has ended, and you just want both parties to be able to get on with their lives, with the resources they need and deserve."

The cost of divorce 2001 Shan Lambert received £7.5 million from ex-husband Harry, founder of the Adscene newspaper group 2002 Abdullah Masry, Arab businessman, ordered to pay former wife £26.3 million 2005 £30 million paid by WPP Group chief executive Martin Sorrell to his ex-wife Sandra after 32-year marriage 2006 House of Lords ruled that Melissa Miller could keep £5 million awarded from the £17.5 million wealth of her husband Alan, a fund manager 2006 House of Lords ruled Julia McFarlane was entitled to £250,000 a year, potentially for life, from ex-husband Kenneth 2007 Court of Appeal upheld £48 million award to Beverley Charman, then largest in British legal history, from ex-

husband John Charman 2008 Sir Paul McCartney pays wife Heather, left, £24.3 million 2009 Bernie Ecclestone granted divorce — expected to set world record with £1 billion settlement 2001 Rupert Murdoch's split with his second wife Anna is widely reported to have been "the most expensive". It is said to have cost the News Corporation chief \$1.7 billion (£1 billion).